

LENIN  
ON  
PETTY-BOURGEOIS  
REVOLUTIONISM



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# LENIN ON PETTY-BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONISM

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## **CONTENTS**

### **I**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>From Marxism and Revisionism (1908)</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>From Differences in the European Labour Movement (1910)</b>	<b>21</b>

### **II**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>From The Revolutionary Phrase (1918)</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>From Strange and Monstrous (1918)</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>From Left Wing Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality (1918)</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>From The Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government (1919)</b>	<b>53</b>

### **III**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>From Left Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder (1920)</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>From Speech in Defence of the Tactics of the Communist International (1921)</b>	<b>82</b>

### **IV**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>From The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism (1921)</b>	<b>95</b>



**Every specific turn in history causes some change in the form of petty bourgeois wavering, which always occurs alongside the proletariat, and which in one degree or another, always penetrates its midst.**

Petty bourgeois reformism, i.e., servility to the bourgeoisie covered by a cloak of sentimental democratic and "Social" Democratic phrases and fatuous wishes; and petty bourgeois revolutionism—menacing, blustering and boastful in words, but a mere bubble of disunity, disruption and brainlessness in deeds. This wavering will inevitably occur until the taproot of capitalism is cut.

**V I. LENIN**

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## I

When we speak about the creative character of Lenin's teaching and call Leninism the theory and practice of a revolutionary approach to reality we are emphasising above all Lenin's profound and undogmatic understanding of social development processes which opens up broad opportunities for theoretical thought and practical work

Not always however do we fully realise Lenin's political wisdom scientific perspicuity and sense of purpose and when the need arose his ability to give battle against long standing traditions and generally accepted dogmas All these features were characteristic of Lenin the leader of a political party of a new type one who mapped out a plan for transforming backward Russia into a socialist state and who was the first to herald a new era of social revolutions He counterposed a truly revolutionary programme of action to the dogmas of Western Social Democracy opportunist ideology and social reformism which had a considerable influence among working-class parties in Europe and America for quite some time particularly at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century

Lenin challenged the views of such leaders of the international workers movement as Karl Kautsky

whose prestige as a theoretician was extremely high before the First World War (1914-18). In Lenin's works of that period there were many quotations from Kautsky the Marxist. But unlike Kautsky Lenin was not shackled by the letter of a theory. He was convinced—and brilliantly proved it on many occasions—that any rigidness in matters of theory inevitably led to dogmatism and that one could preserve a true revolutionary spirit only if one did not lose the ability to see the world in a new way without prejudice and without being burdened with a set of ready-made formulas.

At the same time Lenin fought over a period of many years both before and after the socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 against ultra revolutionism, anarchism and Left sectarianism which represented another extreme in assessing the aims, methods and tactics of the working class movement and which regarded revolution as the end in itself. Lenin was resolutely opposed to these varieties of dogmatism both within the Bolshevik party which he founded in 1903 and within the international communist and workers' movement.

For all their outward dissimilarity the Right and Left dogmatists alike proceeded (and they still do today) from the assumption that Marxism could be applied as a blueprint mechanically and that it could be codified. Both would single out one aspect of the movement and dwell on that alone or would take one idea or phenomenon and turn it into a theory—the difference being that open opportunists recognise only peaceful forms of struggle for local reforms while the Left reject unconditionally such reforms and call for a revolution at all costs.

In his writings, numerous statements, letters and notes, Lenin explained that the turning of any one aspect or trend of the revolutionary movement into

an absolute is untenable theoretically and highly dangerous practically In condemning the adventurism of the ultra revolutionaries Lenin referred again and again to Marx and Engels the founders of scientific communism who warned against attempts to get ahead of developments to make an impromptu revolution and call for the immediate overthrow of the existing order when neither the objective nor the subjective conditions for this existed

Creative Marxism as Lenin had shown demands that the choice of forms of struggle for socialism be determined by concrete historical conditions and rejects all abstract rigid formulas and recipes regardless of whether they emanate from the Right or

Left For Lenin wrote real life real history *includes* different tendencies just as life and development in nature include both slow evolution and rapid leaps breaks in continuity (from *Differences in the European Labour Movement*)

But Lenin did not only point out the theoretical mistakes of the Right and Left dogmatists fight against their tactical and strategic programmes and actions and expose all the harm which these programmes and actions did to the consistent revolutionary struggle of the working class and its allies He believed it to be absolutely necessary to show what these two trends had in common-as they still have today-for both attacked Marxism but from two different directions In other words Lenin showed the identity of their social origin Lenin had explained on many occasions that both open conciliation with the ruling bourgeoisie and adventurism of the heroes of revolutionary phrase-making resulted from the influence which the petty bourgeoisie with its political vacillations and quick changes of sentiments from revolutionary enthusiasm to despair exerted on

the proletariat especially on its less politically conscious sections

This influence varies—it may be fairly strong or relatively weak or it may last over a long period or recur from time to time. But it makes itself felt because the working class is not isolated from other classes and strata of society including the petty bourgeoisie members of which replenish the proletariat's ranks from time to time.

This book contains excerpts taken from a number of Lenin's works and statements in which he discusses the revolutionary ideas and sentiments of the

Leftist trend or as it is sometimes called petty bourgeois revolutionism. The latter of course did not emerge and develop in a vacuum but took shape under the definite even if indirect influence of Right social reformism and revisionism. Thus the collection opens with excerpts from Lenin's *Marxism and Revisionism* (1908) and *Differences in the European Labour Movement* (1910) which have long become classics.

This collection does not attempt to cover the entire subject—this would not be feasible for a book of this size. It has a more modest purpose which is to present some pages from the history of Lenin's battle against the Right and Left dogmatists.

The material is arranged chronologically. Each section is preceded by a brief introduction and explanatory notes are provided to the text. One foot note is Lenin's own which is duly marked.

**From**  
**MARXISM AND REVISIONISM**

There is a well known saying that if geometrical axioms affected human interests attempts would certainly be made to refute them Theories of natural history which conflicted with the old prejudices of theology provoked and still provoke the most rabid opposition No wonder therefore that the Marxian doctrine which directly serves to enlighten and organise the advanced class in modern society indicates the tasks facing this class and demonstrates the inevitable replacement (by virtue of economic development) of the present system by a new order—no wonder that this doctrine has had to fight for every step forward in the course of its life

Needless to say this applies to bourgeois science and philosophy officially taught by official professors in order to befuddle the rising generation of the propertied classes and to coach it against internal and foreign enemies This science will not even hear of Marxism declaring that it has been refuted and annihilated Marx is attacked with equal zest by young scholars who are making a career by refuting socialism and by decrepit elders who are preserving the tradition of all kinds of outworn systems The progress of Marxism the fact that its ideas are spreading and taking firm hold among

the working class inevitably increase the frequency and intensity of these bourgeois attacks on Marxism which becomes stronger more hardened and more vigorous every time it is annihilated by official science

But even among doctrines connected with the struggle of the working class and current mainly among the proletariat Marxism by no means consolidated its position all at once In the first half century of its existence (from the 1840s on) Marxism was engaged in combating theories fundamentally hostile to it In the early forties Marx and Engels settled accounts with the radical Young Hegelians<sup>1</sup> whose viewpoint was that of philosophical idealism At the end of the forties the struggle began in the field of economic doctrine against Proudhonism<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Young Hegelians* (Bruno Bauer Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach Arnold Ruge and others) came out against a purely religious interpretation of the doctrine of Hegel (1770 1831) an outstanding German philosopher and idealist They were ideologists of the radical bourgeoisie They put forward the idea of the critically thinking individual as opposed to the non critical masses and rejected the existence of objective historical laws For a detailed criticism of the philosophical views and political ideas of the Young Hegelians see *The Holy Family* (1845) and *The German Ideology* (1845 46) by Marx and Engels

<sup>2</sup> *Proudhonism* a petty bourgeois socialist trend named after its ideologist Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809 65) a theoretician of anarchism While criticising big capitalist property he upheld and extolled small property set forth utopian plans for overcoming exploitation by organising money free exchange between artisans merchants owners of small enterprises and workers with the help of which workers would allegedly be able to acquire their own means of production become artisans and ensure a just sale of their products As an anarchist Proudhon did not accept the state in any form regarding it as the main instrument of oppression Proudhon's principal work was *Système des contradictions économiques ou philosophie de la misère*

The fifties saw the completion of this struggle in criticism of the parties and doctrines which manifested themselves in the stormy year of 1848.<sup>3</sup> In the sixties the struggle shifted from the field of general theory to one closer to the direct labour movement the ejection of Bakuninism<sup>4</sup> from the International.<sup>5</sup> In the early seventies the stage in Germany was occupied for a short while by the Proudhonist Muhlberger<sup>6</sup> and in the late seventies by

(System of Economic Contradiction or the Philosophy of Poverty) In his work *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) Marx brilliantly showed that the theoretical and political ideas of Proudhon's work and Proudhonism in general were untenable and reactionary

<sup>3</sup> In 1848 bourgeois democratic revolutions broke out in a number of European countries

<sup>4</sup> Bakuninism a trend that derived its name from Mikhail A Bakunin (1814-76) an ideologist of anarchism. The Bakuninists waged an obstinate struggle against the Marxist theory and tactics concerning the working class movement. Their main postulate was a rejection of the state including a proletarian state. Having joined the First International in 1864 they formed within it an anarchist organisation the Association of International Brothers. The Bakuninists were expelled from the First International at its Hague congress in 1872.

<sup>5</sup> First International (International Working Men's Association) was the first ever international revolutionary organisation of the proletariat (1864-76). Under the leadership of Marx and Engels it played an outstanding role in the spread of scientific socialism and its merging with the labour movement. The First International which led the workers' struggle in many countries prepared the ground for setting up in each of these countries an independent political party of the proletariat.

<sup>6</sup> Muhlberger Arthur (1847-1907) a German publicist and representative of petty bourgeois socialism. In his work *The Housing Question* written in the form of a polemic against Muhlberger Engels completed the theoretical defeat of Proudhonism the battle against which was started by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

the positivist Dühring.<sup>7</sup> But the influence of both on the proletariat was already absolutely insignificant Marxism was already gaining an unquestionable victory over all other ideologies in the labour movement.

By the nineties this victory was in the main completed. Even in the Latin countries where the traditions of Proudhonism held their ground longest of all the workers' parties in effect built their programmes and their tactics on Marxist foundations.

But after Marxism had ousted all the more or less integral doctrines hostile to it the tendencies expressed in those doctrines began to seek other channels. The forms and causes of the struggle changed but the struggle continued. And the second half-century of the existence of Marxism began (in the nineties) with the struggle of a trend hostile to Marxism within Marxism itself.

Bernstein<sup>8</sup> a one time orthodox Marxist gave his

<sup>7</sup> The philosophic and political views of *Eugen Dühring* (1833-1921) German economist and philosopher who was also an ideologist of the petty bourgeoisie were subjected to sharp criticism by Engels in *Anti-Dühring* (1878). Engels's book contains a comprehensive and classical account of the three component parts of Marxism—dialectical and historical materialism, political economy and the theory of scientific communism.

<sup>8</sup> Bernstein Eduard (1850-1932) leader of the extreme Right wing of German Social Democracy and the Second International (see note on p. 72). From 1896 to 1898 he published a series of articles under the general title *The Problems of Socialism* in which he revised the basic principles of Marxism in philosophy, political economy, the theory of scientific communism and the theory of revolution. He advocated the concept of the dying away of the class struggle in capitalist society and believed that the only task of the working class was to struggle for minor reforms within the system of capitalism. Hence his demand to transform Social Democracy from a party of social revolution to a party of social reforms. All subsequent acti-

name to this trend by coming forward with the most noise and with the most purposeful expression of amendments to Marx revision of Marx revisionism

Let us then examine the ideological content of revisionism

In the sphere of philosophy revisionism followed in the wake of bourgeois professorial science. The professors went back to Kant and repeated the platitudes that priests have uttered a thousand times against philosophical materialism—and the revisionists smiling indulgently mumbled (word for word after the latest *Handbuch*) that materialism had been refuted long ago. The professors treated Hegel as a dead dog and while themselves preaching idealism only an idealism a thousand times more petty and banal than Hegel's contemptuously shrugged their shoulders at dialectics—and the revisionists floundered after them into the swamp of philosophical vulgarisation of science replacing artful (and revolutionary) dialectics by simple (and tranquil) evolution. The professors earned their official salaries by adjusting both their idealist and their critical systems to the dominant medieval philosophy (i.e. to theology)—and the revisionists drew close to them trying to make religion a private affair not in relation to the modern state but in relation to the party of the advanced class.

Passing to political economy it must be noted first of all that in this sphere the amendments of the revisionists were much more comprehensive and circumstantial attempts were made to influence the public by new data on economic development. It

vity of Bernstein—during the First World War and after the October 1917 Socialist Revolution in Russia—was openly hostile to the theory and practice of Leninism

was said that concentration and the ousting of small scale production by large-scale production do not occur in agriculture at all while they proceed very slowly in commerce and industry It was said that crises had now become rarer and weaker and that cartels and trusts would probably enable capital to eliminate them altogether It was said that the theory of collapse to which capitalism is heading was unsound owing to the tendency of class antagonisms to become milder and less acute

The fight against the revisionists on these questions resulted in as fruitful a revival of the theoretical thought in international socialism as did Engels's controversy with Duhring twenty years earlier The arguments of the revisionists were analysed with the help of facts and figures It was proved that the revisionists were systematically painting a rose-coloured picture of modern small scale production The technical and commercial superiority of large-scale production over small scale production not only in industry but also in agriculture is proved by irrefutable facts But commodity production is far less developed in agriculture and modern statisticians and economists are as a rule not very skilful in picking out the special branches (sometimes even the operations) in agriculture which indicate that agriculture is being progressively drawn into the process of *exchange* in world economy Every advance in science and technology inevitably and relentlessly undermines the foundations of small scale production in capitalist society and it is the task of socialist political economy to investigate this process in all its forms often complicated and intricate revisionists sinned in the scientific sense by superficial generalisations based on facts selected one sidedly and without reference to the system of capitalism as a whole

The position of revisionism was even worse as regards the theory of crises and the theory of collapse Only for a very short time could people and then only the most short sighted think of refashioning the foundations of Marx's theory under the influence of a few years of industrial boom and prosperity Realities very soon made it clear to the revisionists that crises were not a thing of the past prosperity was followed by a crisis The forms the sequence the picture of particular crises changed but crises remained an inevitable component of the capitalist system

In the sphere of politics revisionism did really try to revise the foundation of Marxism namely the doctrine of the class struggle Political freedom democracy and universal suffrage remove the ground for the class struggle—we were told

It cannot be disputed that these arguments of the revisionists amounted to a fairly well balanced system of views namely the old and well known liberal bourgeois views The liberals have always said that bourgeois parliamentarism destroys classes and class divisions since the right to vote and the right to participate in the government of the country are shared by all citizens without distinction The whole history of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century and the whole history of the Russian revolution in the early twentieth<sup>9</sup> clearly show how absurd such views are Economic distinctions are not mitigated but aggravated and intensified under the freedom of democratic capitalism Parliamentarism does not eliminate but lays bare the innate character even of the most democratic bourgeois republics as organs of class oppression By helping

<sup>9</sup> This refers to the 1905-1907 revolution the first bourgeois-democratic revolution of the century

to enlighten and to organise immeasurably wider masses of the population than those which previously took an active part in political events parliamentarism does not make for the elimination of crises and political revolutions but for the maximum intensification of civil war during such revolutions The events in Paris in the spring of 1871<sup>10</sup> and the events in Russia in the winter of 1905 showed as clearly as could be how inevitably this intensification comes about

A natural complement to the economic and political tendencies of revisionism was its attitude to the ultimate aim of the socialist movement The movement is everything the ultimate aim is nothing —this catch phrase of Bernstein's expresses the substance of revisionism better than many long disquisitions To determine its conduct from case to case to adapt itself to the events of the day and to the chopping and changing of petty politics to forget the primary interests of the proletariat and the basic features of the whole capitalist system of all capitalist evolution to sacrifice these primary interests for the real or assumed advantages of the moment—such is the policy of revisionism And it patently follows from the very nature of this policy that it may assume an infinite variety of forms and that every more or less new question every more or less unexpected and unforeseen turn of events even though it change the basic line of development only to an insignificant degree and only for the briefest period will always inevitably give rise to one variety of revisionism or another

<sup>10</sup> The reference is to the *Paris Commune* the first ever revolutionary government of the working class established by Paris workers in March 1871 The Commune existed for 72 days

The inevitability of revisionism is determined by its class roots in modern society Revisionism is an international phenomenon In reality the division within the present international socialist movement is now proceeding along the *same* lines in all the various countries of the world which testifies to a tremendous advance compared with thirty or forty years ago when heterogeneous trends in the various countries were struggling within the one international socialist movement And that revisionism from the left which has taken shape in the Latin countries as revolutionary syndicalism <sup>11</sup> is also adapting itself to Marxism amending it Labriola in Italy <sup>12</sup> and Lagardelle in France <sup>13</sup> frequently appeal from Marx who is understood wrongly to Marx who is understood rightly

<sup>11</sup> *Revolutionary syndicalism* a petty bourgeois semi-anarchistic trend in the working class movement in a number of West European countries at the end of the last century The syndicalists denied the necessity of political struggle of the working class and the founding of a proletarian party They believed that trade unions (syndicates) could do away with capitalism without a revolution and without seizure of power by the working class by organising a general strike and taking over management of production

<sup>12</sup> *Labriola Arturo* (1873 1959) Italian political figure and a leader of the syndicalist movement in Italy During the First World War he took a *social chauvinist* stand (see note on p 59) He was Italian Minister of Labour in 1920 21 and lived abroad from 1928 to 1939 After the Italian government signed the aggressive Atlantic pact in 1949 Labriola joined the peace movement

<sup>13</sup> *Lagardelle Hubert* (1874 1928) French petty bourgeois politician and anarcho syndicalist author of works on the history of anarcho syndicalism in France social chauvinist during the First World War Minister of Labour (1942 43) in the Pétain government in 1946 sentenced to life imprisonment for participation in the government that had collaborated with the German occupation army

We cannot stop here to analyse the ideological content of *this* revisionism which as yet is far from having developed to the same extent as opportunist revisionism it has not yet become international has not yet stood the test of a single big practical battle with a socialist party in any single country We confine ourselves therefore to that revisionism from the right which was described above

Wherein lies its inevitability in capitalist society? Why is it more profound than the differences of national peculiarities and of degrees of capitalist development? Because in every capitalist country side by side with the proletariat there are always broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie small proprietors Capitalism arose and is constantly arising out of small production A number of new middle strata are inevitably brought into existence again and again by capitalism (appendages to the factory work at home small workshops scattered all over the country to meet the requirements of big industries such as the bicycle and automobile industries etc) These new small producers are just as inevitably being cast again into the ranks of the proletariat It is quite natural that the petty bourgeois world-outlook should again and again crop up in the ranks of the broad workers parties It is quite natural that this should be so and always will be so right up to the changes of fortune that will take place in the proletarian revolution For it would be a profound mistake to think that the complete proletarianisation of the majority of the population is essential for bringing about such a revolution What we now frequently experience only in the domain of ideology namely disputes over theoretical amendments to Marx what now crops up in practice only over individual side issues of the labour movement as tactical differences with the revisionists and splits on this ba

sis-is bound to be experienced by the working class on an incomparably larger scale when the proletarian revolution will sharpen all disputed issues will focus all differences on points which are of the most immediate importance in determining the conduct of the masses and will make it necessary in the heat of the fight to distinguish enemies from friends and to cast out bad allies in order to deal decisive blows at the enemy

The ideological struggle waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the nineteenth century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat which is marching forward to the complete victory of its cause despite all the wavering and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie

March 1908

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(Further references are to volume and page numbers)*

From  
**DIFFERENCES  
IN THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MOVEMENT**

**I**

The principal tactical differences in the present day labour movement of Europe and America reduce themselves to a struggle against two big trends that are departing from Marxism which has in fact become the dominant theory in this movement These two trends are revisionism (opportunism reformism) and anarchism (anarcho-syndicalism anar-

cho socialism) Both these departures from the Marx ist theory and Marxist tactics that are dominant in the labour movement were to be observed in various forms and in various shades in all civilised countries during the more than half century of history of the mass labour movement

This fact alone shows that these departures can not be attributed to accident or to the mistakes of individuals or groups or even to the influence of na tional characteristics and traditions and so forth There must be deep rooted causes in the economic system and in the character of the development of all capitalist countries which constantly give rise to these departures

One of the most profound causes that periodically give rise to differences over tactics is the very growth of the labour movement If this movement is not measured by the criterion of some fantastic ideal but is regarded as the practical movement of ordinary people it will be clear that the enlist ment of larger and larger numbers of new recruits the attraction of new sections of the working peo ple must inevitably be accompanied by wavering s in the sphere of theory and tactics by repetitions of old mistakes by a temporary reversion to antiquated views and antiquated methods and so forth The labour movement of every country periodically spends a varying amount of energy attention and time on the training of recruits

a constant source of differences is the dialec tical nature of social development which proceeds in contradictions and through contradictions Capi talism is progressive because it destroys the old methods of production and develops productive for ces yet at the same time at a certain stage of develop ment it retards the growth of productive forces It develops organises and disciplines the workers-and

it crushes oppresses leads to degeneration poverty etc Capitalism creates its own grave digger itself creates the elements of a new system yet at the same time without a leap these individual elements change nothing in the general state of affairs and do not affect the rule of capital It is Marxism the theory of dialectical materialism that is able to encompass these contradictions of living reality of the living history of capitalism and the working class movement But needless to say the masses learn from life and not from books and therefore certain individuals or groups constantly exaggerate elevate to a one-sided theory to a one-sided system of tactics now one and now another feature of capitalist development now one and now another lesson of this development

Bourgeois ideologists liberals and democrats not understanding Marxism and not understanding the modern labour movement are constantly jumping from one futile extreme to another At one time they explain the whole matter by asserting that evil minded persons incite class against class-at another they console themselves with the idea that the workers party is a peaceful party of reform Both anarcho-syndicalism and reformism must be regarded as a direct product of this bourgeois world outlook and its influence They seize upon one aspect of the labour movement elevate one-sidedness to a theory and declare mutually exclusive those tendencies or features of this movement that are a specific peculiarity of a given period of given conditions of working-class activity But real life real history includes these different tendencies just as life and development in nature include both slow evolution and rapid leaps breaks in continuity

The revisionists regard as phrase mongering all arguments about leaps and about the working-

class movement being antagonistic in principle to the whole of the old society They regard reforms as a partial realisation of socialism The anarcho-syndicalists reject petty work especially the utilisation of the parliamentary platform In practice the latter tactics amount to waiting for great days along with an inability to muster the forces which create great events Both of them hinder the thing that is most important and most urgent namely to unite the workers in big powerful and properly functioning organisations capable of functioning well under *all* circumstances permeated with the spirit of the class struggle clearly realising their aims and trained in the true Marxist world outlook

Finally an extremely important cause of differences among those taking part in the labour movement lies in changes in the tactics of the ruling classes in general and of the bourgeoisie in particular If the tactics of the bourgeoisie were always uniform or at least of the same kind the working class would rapidly learn to reply to them by tactics just as uniform or of the same kind But as a matter of fact in every country the bourgeoisie inevitably devises two systems of rule two methods of fighting for its interests and of maintaining its domination and these methods at times succeed each other and at times are interwoven in various combinations The first of these is the method of force the method which rejects all concessions to the labour movement the method of supporting all the old and obsolete institutions the method of irreconcilably rejecting reforms The second is the method of liberalism of steps towards the development of political rights towards reforms concessions and so forth

The bourgeoisie passes from one method to the other not because of the malicious intent of indivi

duals and not accidentally but owing to the fundamentally contradictory nature of its own position Normal capitalist society cannot develop successfully without a firmly established representative system and without certain political rights for the population which is bound to be distinguished by its relatively high cultural demands These demands for a certain minimum of culture are created by the conditions of the capitalist mode of production itself with its high technique complexity flexibility mobility rapid development of world competition and so forth In consequence vacillations in the tactics of the bourgeoisie transitions from the system of force to the system of apparent concessions have been characteristic of the history of all European countries during the last half century the various countries developing primarily the application of the one method or the other at definite periods For instance in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century Britain was the classical country of liberal bourgeois policy Germany in the seventies and eighties adhered to the method of force and so on

When this method prevailed in Germany a one-sided echo of this particular system of bourgeois government was the growth of anarcho-syndicalism or anarchism as it was then called in the labour movement When in 1890 the change to concessions took place this change as is always the case proved to be even more dangerous to the labour movement and gave rise to an equally one-sided echo of bourgeois reformism opportunism in the labour movement

Not infrequently the bourgeoisie for a certain time achieves its object by a liberal policy A part of the workers and a part of their representatives at times allow themselves to be deceived by

seeming concessions The revisionists declare that the doctrine of the class struggle is antiquated or begin to conduct a policy which is in fact a renunciation of the class struggle The zigzags of bourgeois tactics intensify revisionism within the labour movement and not infrequently bring the differences within the labour movement to the point of an outright split

All causes of the kind indicated give rise to differences over tactics within the labour movement and within the proletarian ranks But there is not and cannot be a Chinese wall between the proletariat and the sections of the petty bourgeoisie in contact with it including the peasantry It is clear that the passing of certain individuals groups and sections of the petty bourgeoisie into the ranks of the proletariat is bound in its turn to give rise to vacillations in the tactics of the latter

The experience of the labour movement of various countries helps us to understand on the basis of concrete practical questions the nature of Marx ist tactics it helps the younger countries to distinguish more clearly the true class significance of departures from Marxism and to combat these departures more successfully

## II

Lenin whose conclusions were always the result of careful analysis of the situation and balance of forces at each given moment was uncompromising with regard to the Left doctrinaire trend with its theoretical ineffectualness and political extremism. He had repeatedly pointed out the harmfulness and irresponsibility of leftist slogans and trends that pushed the revolutionary movement onto the road of adventures and that eventually doomed its efforts.

Lenin was particularly intolerant toward completely unjustified leftist deviations in the ranks of the proletarian party for they weakened and disrupted the party and undermined unity of will and action.

When in 1908-13 following the suppression of the 1905-07 bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia the conditions for struggle grew worse Lenin and his supporters found themselves in an ideological clash with a leftist group called *otzovists* which had appeared within the Bolshevik party. It derived its name from the Russian word *otzyvat* meaning to recall because disregarding the political situation of the time its members demanded that the Social-Democratic deputies be recalled from parliament (the State Duma) it denied the possibility of Bolshevik participation in legal mass organisations such

as trade unions or workers mutual aid funds and called upon the party to go underground

In Lenin's works of that period \* the tactical principles of the otzovists are subjected to thorough and well reasoned criticism. Lenin showed that the otzovists tried to artificially limit the scope of work of the party and consequently to split and disunite it whether consciously or unconsciously they tried to erect some kind of a barrier between the political vanguard of the working class and the working class itself and in fact to separate the workers struggle from all other forms and manifestations of democratic movement in Russia in general.

For Lenin the ideological polemics with the otzovists had never been an end in itself. For several years after the clash he did his best to help those who were sincerely mistaken to see their errors and return to party positions. Lenin's efforts bore fruit many of the Left discarded their sectarian misconceptions and again worked with the party.

Lenin's struggle against revolutionism became particularly acute in January March 1918 several months after the victory of the October socialist revolution.

Russia was exhausted by the war which Germany unleashed against the *Entente* countries in 1914 and which lasted for more than three years. Russia's army had practically ceased to exist. Soldiers victims of the imperialist war which was senseless and alien to their interests were leaving the front on

\* Materials relating to this stage of Lenin's struggle against the Left are not included in this collection. Those who are interested in the subject are referred to Lenin's article *The Faction of Supporters of Otzovism and God Building* Coll Works Vol 16 pp 29 61

their own Meanwhile Kaiser Germany taking advantage of the situation was about to start a new offensive against Russian positions A deadly danger hanged over the newly born workers and peasants state

In this grave situation Lenin displayed qualities of a true statesman-political foresight the scientific exactness of an analyst and the flexibility and resourcefulness of a diplomat

Assessing the actual balance of forces Lenin came to the conclusion that the gains of the socialist revolution could be upheld only if Soviet Russia signed immediately a separate peace treaty even on the most onerous terms with Germany and its allies whose combined economic and military strength was immeasurably greater than that of Russia

On the other hand Lenin was confident (and subsequent events showed that he was right) that only by protecting and preserving the world's first socialist state with all available means would it be possible later to build up the basis of the world revolutionary movement

This realistic position was vehemently attacked by a group of Left Communists within the party

Paralysed by rigid theoretical and political thinking and a narrow dogmatic interpretation of revolutionary duty they opposed Lenin's dialectics by engaging in unrestrained and irresponsible phrase-mongering Proceeding from the dangerous assumption the worse the better they called for open military confrontation with world imperialism that is to say for a continuation of the world war which according to their blueprint should trigger off a world revolution Clinging to a false alternative—either a world war or death of the revolution—the Left Communists did everything to wreck

the peace negotiations that had got under way in the town of Brest

Without taking the trouble to investigate the real situation and overestimating the strength of the revolutionary movement in Austro Hungary and Germany the Left Communists held that a confrontation between the Soviet republic and the hostile capitalist world would be of short duration and that the Russian revolution would find response among rebel movements in many countries any day now Thus it was said the continuing German offensive presented no danger if the revolutionary people of Russia devoted all their energy to waging guerilla warfare in the enemy rear In other words if social ist Russia perished there would appear other centers of revolution

In those tense months Lenin showed great self command and patience and tried to bring to reason the Left Communist leaders and those rank and file Party members who had fallen under their influence He explained the danger inherent in their policy and urged them to abandon it so that at some future time people will not say of us a bitter truth that a revolutionary phrase about revolutionary war ruined the revolution \*\* Thus for example at the Extraordinary Seventh Party Congress convened to ratify the Brest peace treaty Lenin took the floor seventeen times

While explaining tirelessly that the country needed a peaceful respite as it needed air Lenin at the

\* We shall not discuss here Trotsky's stand on the issue As head of the Soviet delegation at the peace negotiations he actually supported the Left Communists on every point The divisive anti Party activities and tactical principles of Trotsky and his followers are dealt with in a separate volume to be published shortly

\*\* *Coll Works Vol 27 p 29*

same time foresaw that peace with its predatory terms would not last long He proved to be right In just eight months the German militarists who had intended to settle on the occupied Soviet territories for a long time had to leave for home Because of the outbreak of revolution in Germany the Brest treaty was annulled

Many of Lenin's statements made in connection with the Brest peace have a significance which goes beyond what is immediately applicable to that particular event

For it was in his polemic against the Left Communists that Lenin going back again and again to the pressing tasks of the moment showed the inevitability and expediency of peaceful forms of adjustment of inter state relations irrespective of the social system prevailing in this or that country He was in fact outlining the basic foreign policy principles of Soviet Russia And it was these principles that with time crystallised into the doctrine of peaceful coexistence

It was also soon after the conclusion of the Brest treaty that Lenin elaborated practical ways and methods for the building of a socialist economy

For Lenin there could be no socialist society without an economic foundation that corresponded to that society He therefore regarded the development of social production in particular the organisation of labour and the raising of productivity as the priority task of the Party and of the state as a whole Hence Lenin's constant struggle against all manifestations of mismanagement lack of discipline petty bourgeois laxity and an underestimation of the importance of day to-day production work

Attaching great importance to efficient organisation and technical expertise in production (on this point too Lenin criticised the Left Communists )

he said that it was necessary to use the managerial and technical experience of the bourgeoisie to learn socialism from the organisers of the trusts \* Lenin explained that this was not only a question of speeding up economic progress but also of using state capitalism which was one of the elements of Russia's economic structure of that time for the building of the economic foundations of socialism He was convinced that in a state where power belonged to the people and where banks and major enterprises had been nationalised businesslike co-operation with individual capitalists was permissible

Such a flexible approach was beyond the comprehension of the Left Communists who also rejected Lenin's idea about co-operating with members of the old technical and scientific intelligentsia They claimed that such ideas would enslave the working class and accused Right Bolsheviks of conciliationism of inadmissible compromises with the class enemy

Lenin's statements and articles directed against the arid approach of the Left Communists in foreign and domestic policies thus touched upon a broad range of problems They provide a brilliant example of Marxist polemic and they are a proof that only a creative approach to these problems can ensure loyalty—in deed and not merely in words—to the basic principles of scientific socialism

\* *Coll Works Vol 27 p 296*

**From  
THE REVOLUTIONARY PHRASE**

Revolutionary phrase-making more often than not is a disease from which revolutionary parties suffer at times when they constitute directly or indirectly a combination alliance or intermingling of proletarian and petty-bourgeois elements and when the course of revolutionary events is marked by big rapid zigzags By revolutionary phrase-making we mean the repetition of revolutionary slogans irrespective of objective circumstances at a given turn in events in the given state of affairs obtaining at the time The slogans are superb alluring intoxicating but there are no grounds for them such is the nature of the revolutionary phrase

February 1918

Vol 27 p 19

**From  
STRANGE AND MONSTROUS**

Perhaps the authors<sup>14</sup> believe that the interests of the world revolution forbid making any

<sup>14</sup> The reference is to the authors of the resolution adopted by the Moscow group of "Left Communists" in which they said that they refused to abide by the party's decisions on the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany

peace at all with imperialists? The incorrectness of this view is as clear as day A socialist republic surrounded by imperialist powers could not from this point of view conclude any economic treaties and could not exist at all without flying to the moon

Perhaps the authors believe that the interests of the world revolution require that it should be *given a push* and that such a push can be given only by war never by peace which might give the people the impression that imperialism was being legitimised ? Such a theory would be completely at variance with Marxism for Marxism has always been opposed to pushing revolutions which develop with the growing acuteness of the class antagonisms that engender revolutions Such a theory would be tantamount to the view that armed uprising is a form of struggle which is obligatory always and under all conditions

Perhaps the authors of the resolution believe that revolution has already begun in Germany and has already reached the stage of an open nation wide civil war that we must therefore devote our strength to helping the German workers and must perish ourselves ( losing Soviet power )<sup>15</sup> to save a German revolution which has already started its decisive fight and is being hard pressed? According to this theory we while perishing ourselves would be diverting part of the forces of German counter revolution thereby saving the German revolution

But obviously these premises do not exist The German revolution is ripening but it has obvious

<sup>15</sup> The resolution of "Left Communists" contained the following statement "In the interests of a world revolution we consider it expedient to risk the possibility of the loss of Soviet power which is becoming purely formal Lenin called this statement "strange and monstrous"

ly not reached the stage of an explosion in Germany of civil war in Germany By accepting the possibility of losing Soviet power we certainly would not be helping the German revolution to reach maturity but *would be hindering it* We would be helping Germany reaction playing into its hands hampering the socialist movement in Germany and frightening away from socialism large masses of German proletarians and semi proletarians who have not yet come over to socialism and would be scared by the defeat of Soviet Russia just as the British workers were scared by the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871

Soviet power is now becoming purely formal - this as we see is the monstrous view the authors of the Moscow resolution have come to proclaim

Since the German imperialists are going to make us pay indemnities and forbid us to carry on propaganda and agitation against Germany Soviet power loses all significance and becomes purely formal -this is probably the line of reasoning of the authors of the resolution We say probably for the authors offer nothing clear and specific in support of their thesis

Profound and hopeless pessimism and complete despair-such is the sum and substance of the theory that the significance of Soviet power is purely formal and that tactics which will risk the possible loss of Soviet power are permissible Since there is no salvation anyway then let even Soviet power perish-such is the sentiment that dictated this monstrous resolution

Is it the staunchness of the proletarian who knows that one must submit when strength is lacking and is then nevertheless able to rise again and again at any price and to build up strength under

*all circumstances that corresponds to these tactics of despair or rather the spinelessness of the petty bourgeois ?*

No dear Moscow extremist comrades every day of trial will drive away from you those very workers who are the most class conscious and the staunchest

Never will any foreign conquest render a popular political institution purely formal (and Soviet power is *not* only a political institution far and away superior to anything known to history) On the contrary alien conquest will only strengthen popular sympathy for Soviet power provided—provided it does not indulge in reckless follies

more humiliating than any harsh or even extremely harsh peace rendered imperative owing to the lack of an army—more humiliating than any humiliating peace is humiliating despair We shall not perish even from a dozen obnoxious peace treaties if we take revolt and war *seriously* No conquerors can destroy us if we do not destroy ourselves by despair and phrase-making

February 1918

Vol 27 pp 71 75

From  
**LEFT-WING CHILDISHNESS  
AND  
THE PETTY BOURGEOIS MENTALITY**

The publication by a small group of Left Communists of their journal *Kommunist* (No 1 April 20 1918) and of their theses strikingly confirms my views expressed in the pamphlet *The Immediate*

*Tasks of the Soviet Government.*<sup>16</sup> There could not be better confirmation in political literature of the utter naivete of the defence of petty bourgeois sloppiness that is sometimes concealed by Left slogans. It is useful and necessary to deal with the arguments of Left Communists because they are characteristic of the period we are passing through.

## I

As a political magnitude or as a group claiming to play a political role the Left Communist group has presented its Theses on the Present Situation. It is a good Marxist custom to give a coherent and complete exposition of the principles underlying one's views and tactics. And this good Marxist custom has helped to reveal the mistake committed by our Lefts because the mere attempt to argue and not to declaim exposes the unsoundness of their argument.

The first thing that strikes one is the abundance of allusions hints and evasions with regard to the old question of whether it was right to conclude the Brest Treaty. The Lefts dare not put the question

<sup>16</sup> *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* was the first major work written by Lenin after the October revolution. It dealt with the vital economic and political problems that faced the young Soviet republic. In it Lenin outlined the practical ways of bringing about an upsurge of the country's economy, organising production and the distribution of goods, achieving high productivity and strengthening discipline, building up the defence capability of the republic and forming the army. He also discussed the basic aspects of home and foreign policy of the state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. The harmful ultra revolutionary sentiments and propositions of the Left Communists were criticised.

in a straightforward manner. They flounder about in a comical fashion, pile argument on argument, fish for reasons, plead that "on the one hand" it may be so, but "on the other hand" it may not, their thoughts wander over all and sundry subjects, they try all the time not to see that they are defeating themselves. The "Lefts" are very careful to quote the figures: twelve votes at the Party Congress against peace, twenty-eight votes in favour, but they discreetly refrain from mentioning that of the hundreds of votes cast at the meeting of the Bolshevik group of the Congress of Soviets they obtained less than one-tenth. . . .

Nevertheless, in spite of all the above-mentioned declarations and evasions of the "Lefts" on the question of war and peace, the plain and obvious truth manages to come to light. The authors of the theses are compelled to admit that "the conclusion of peace has for the time being weakened the imperialists' attempts to make a deal on a world scale" (This is inaccurately formulated by the "Lefts", but this is not the place to deal with inaccuracies). "The conclusion of peace has already caused the conflict between the imperialist powers to become more acute."

Now this is a fact. Here is something that has *decisive* significance. That is why those who opposed the conclusion of peace were unwittingly playing things in the hands of the imperialists and fell into the trap laid for them by the imperialists. . . .

"During the coming spring and summer," the "Lefts" write in their theses, "the collapse of the imperialist system must begin. . . ."

This formulation is even more childishly inaccurate despite its playing at science. It is natural for children to "understand" science to mean something that can determine in what year, spring, summer, autumn or winter the "collapse must begin".

These are ridiculous vain attempts to ascertain what cannot be ascertained No serious politician will ever say *when* this or that collapse of a system must begin (the more so that the collapse of the *system* has already begun and it is now a question of the moment when the outbreak of revolution in *particular* countries will begin)

Our Left Communists however who are also fond of calling themselves proletarian Communists because there is very little that is proletarian about them and very much that is petty bourgeois are incapable of giving thought to the balance of forces

## II

Perhaps all these phrases of the Lefts about war can be put down to mere childish exuberance which moreover concerns the past and therefore has not a shadow of political significance? This is the argument some people put up in defence of our Lefts But this is wrong Anyone aspiring to political leadership must be able to *think out* political problems and lack of this ability converts the Lefts into spineless preachers of a policy of vacillation which objectively can have only one result namely by their vacillation the Lefts *are helping* the imperialists to provoke the Russian Soviet Republic into a battle that will obviously be to its disadvantage they *are helping* the imperialists to draw us into a snare Listen to this

The Russian workers revolution cannot save itself by abandoning the path of world revolution by continually avoiding battle and yielding to the pressure of international capital by making concessions to home capital

From this point of view it is necessary to adopt a determined class international policy which will unite international revolutionary propaganda by word and deed and to strengthen the organic connection with international socialism (and not with the international bourgeoisie)

I shall deal separately with the thrusts at home policy contained in this passage But examine this riot of phrase-making in the sphere of foreign policy What tactics *are binding* at the *present time* on all who do not wish to be tools of imperialist provocation and who do not wish to walk into the snare? Every politician must give a clear straightforward reply to this question Our Party's reply is well known At the *present moment* we must *retreat* and avoid battle Our Lefts dare not contradict this and shoot into the air A determined class international policy !!

This is deceiving the people If you want to fight now say so openly If you don't wish to *retreat* now say so openly Otherwise in your objective role you are a tool of imperialist provocation And your subjective mentality is that of a frenzied petty bourgeois who swaggers and blusters but senses perfectly well that the proletarian is *right* in retreating and in trying to retreat in an organised way He senses that the proletarian is right in arguing that because we lack strength we must retreat

The Lefts have no policy of their own They *dare not* declare that retreat at the *present moment* is unnecessary They twist and turn play with words substitute the question of continuously avoiding battle for the question of avoiding battle at the *present moment* They blow soap bubbles such as international revolutionary propaganda by deed !! What does this mean?

It can only mean one of two things: either it is mere Nozdryovism,<sup>17</sup> or it means an offensive war to overthrow international imperialism. Such nonsense cannot be uttered openly, and that is why the "Left" Communists are obliged to take refuge from the derision of every politically conscious proletarian behind high-sounding and empty phrases. . . .

. . . The organised proletarian Communists will certainly punish this "habit" with nothing less than derision and expulsion from all responsible posts. The people must be told the bitter truth simply, clearly and in a straightforward manner: it is possible, and even probable, that the war party will again get the upper hand in Germany (that is, an offensive against us will commence at once), and that Germany together with Japan, by official agreement or by tacit understanding, will partition and strangle us. Our tactics, if we do not want to listen to the ranters, must be to wait, procrastinate, avoid battle and retreat. If we shake off the ranters and "brace ourselves" by creating genuinely iron, genuinely proletarian, genuinely communist discipline, we shall have a good chance of gaining many months.

. . . you<sup>18</sup> devote more effort to learning by heart and committing to memory revolutionary slogans than to thinking them out. This leads you to write "the defence of the socialist fatherland" in quotation marks, which are probably meant to signify your attempts at being ironical, but which really

<sup>17</sup> *Nozdryovism* is a synonym for empty talk and boasting. Nozdryov is a character in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, a boaster, squabbler, and idle talker.

<sup>18</sup> The "Left" Communists.

prove that you are muddleheads You are accustomed to regard defencism as something base and despicable you have learned this and committed it to memory You have learned this by heart so thoroughly that some of you have begun talking non sense to the effect that defence of the fatherland in an imperialist epoch is impermissible (as a matter of fact it is impermissible only in an imperialist reactionary war waged by the bourgeoisie) But you have not thought out why and when defencism is abominable

If war is waged by the exploiting class with the object of strengthening its rule as a class such a war is a criminal war and defencism in such a war is a base betrayal of socialism If war is waged by the proletariat after it has conquered the bourgeoisie in its own country and is waged with the object of strengthening and developing socialism such a war is legitimate and holy

It is precisely in the interests of strengthening the connection with international socialism that we are in duty bound to defend our socialist fatherland Those who treat frivolously the defence of the country in which the proletariat has already achieved victory are the ones who destroy the connection with international socialism When we were the representatives of an oppressed class we did not adopt a frivolous attitude towards defence of the fatherland in an imperialist war We opposed such defence on principle Now that we have become representatives of the ruling class which has begun to organise socialism we demand that everybody adopt a serious attitude towards defence of the country And adopting a serious attitude towards defence of the country means thoroughly preparing for it and strictly calculating the balance of forces

The Left Communists however do not give the slightest indication that they understand the significance of the question of the balance of forces

### III

We shall pass on to the misfortunes of our Left Communists in the sphere of home policy It is difficult to read the following phrases in the theses on the *present situation* without smiling

The systematic use of the remaining means of production is conceivable only if a most determined policy of socialisation is pursued not to capitulate to the bourgeoisie and its petty bourgeois intellectualist servitors but to rout the bourgeoisie and to put down sabotage completely

Dear Left Communists how determined they are but how little thinking they display What do they mean by pursuing a most determined policy of socialisation ?

One may or may not be determined on the question of nationalisation or confiscation but the whole point is that even the greatest possible determination in the world is not enough to pass from nationalisation and confiscation to socialisation The misfortune of our Lefts is that by their naive childish combination of the words most determined policy of socialisation they reveal their utter failure to understand the crux of the question the crux of the present situation The misfortune of our Lefts is that they have missed the very essence of the present situation the transition from confiscation (the carrying out of which requires above all determination in a politician) to socialisation (the carrying out of which requires a *different* quality in the revolutionary)

Today only a blind man could fail to see that we have nationalised confiscated beaten down and put down more than *we have had time to count*. The difference between socialisation and simple confiscation is that confiscation can be carried out by determination alone without the ability to calculate and distribute properly whereas socialisation cannot be brought about without this ability

To put down sabotage completely What a task they have found! Our saboteurs are quite sufficiently put down What we lack is something quite different We lack the proper *calculation* of which saboteurs to set to work and where to place them We lack the organisation of *our own* forces that is needed for say one Bolshevik leader or controller to be able to supervise a hundred saboteurs who are now coming into our service When that is how matters stand to flaunt such phrases as a most determined policy of socialisation routing and completely putting down is just missing the mark

If the words we have quoted provoke a smile the following discovery made by the Left Communists will provoke nothing short of Homeric laughter According to them under the Bolshevik deviation to the right the Soviet Republic is threatened with evolution towards state capitalism They have really frightened us this time! And with what gusto these Left Communists repeat this threatening revelation in their theses and articles

It has not occurred to them that state capitalism would be a *step forward* as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic

I can imagine with what noble indignation a Left Communist will recoil from these words and what devastating criticism he will make to the workers against the Bolshevik deviation to the

right What! Transition to state capitalism in the Soviet Socialist Republic would be a step forward?

Isn't this the betrayal of socialism?

Here we come to the root of the economic mistake of the Left Communists. And that is why we must deal with this point in greater detail.

Firstly the Left Communists do not understand what kind of *transition* it is from capitalism to socialism that gives us the right and the grounds to call our country the Socialist Republic of Soviets.

Secondly they reveal their petty bourgeois mentality precisely by not recognising the petty bourgeois element as the *principal* enemy of socialism in our country.

Thirdly in making a bugbear of state capitalism they betray their failure to understand that the Soviet state differs from the bourgeois state economically.

Let us examine these three points.

No one I think in studying the question of the economic system of Russia has denied its transitional character. Nor I think has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism and not that the new economic system is recognised as a socialist order.

But what does the word *transition* mean? Does it not mean as applied to an economy that the present system contains elements particles fragments of *both* capitalism and socialism? Everyone will admit that it does.

Clearly in a small peasant country the petty-bourgeois element predominates and it must predominate for the great majority of those working the land are small commodity producers. The shell of our state capitalism (grain monopoly state-controlled entrepreneurs and traders bourgeois co-operat-

ors) is pierced now in one place now in another by profiteers the chief object of profiteering being grain.

It is in this field that the main struggle is being waged. It is not state capitalism that is at war with socialism but the petty bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against both state capitalism and socialism. The petty bourgeoisie oppose every kind of state interference accounting and control whether it be state capitalist or state socialist. This is an absolutely unquestionable fact of reality and the root of the economic mistake of the Left Communists is that they have failed to understand it. The profiteer the commercial racketeer the disrupter of monopoly—these are our principal internal enemies the enemies of the economic measures of Soviet power.

Those who fail to see this show by their blindness that they are slaves of petty bourgeois prejudices. This is precisely the case with our Left Communists who in words (and of course in their deepest convictions) are merciless enemies of the petty bourgeoisie while in deeds they help only the petty bourgeoisie serve only this section of the population and express only its point of view by fighting—in April 1918!—against state capitalism. They are wide of the mark!

The petty bourgeois who hoards his thousands is an enemy of state capitalism. He wants to employ his thousands just for himself against the poor in opposition to any kind of state control. And the sum total of these thousands amounting to many thousands of millions forms the base for profiteering which undermines our socialist construction. Let us assume that a certain number of workers produce in a few days values equal to 1 000. Let us then assume that 200 of this total vanishes owing to petty

profiteering various kinds of embezzlement and the evasion by the small proprietors of Soviet decrees and regulations Every politically conscious worker will say that if better order and organisation could be obtained at the price of 300 out of the 1 000 he would willingly give 300 instead of 200 for it will be quite easy under Soviet power to reduce this tribute later on to say 100 or 50 once order and organisation are established and once the petty bourgeois disruption of state monopoly is completely overcome

This simple illustration in figures which I have deliberately simplified to the utmost in order to make it absolutely clear explains the present correlation of state capitalism and socialism The workers hold state power and have every legal opportunity of taking the whole thousand without giving up a single kopek except for socialist purposes This legal opportunity which rests upon the actual transition of power to the workers is an element of socialism

But in many ways the small proprietary and private capitalist element undermines this legal position drags in profiteering hinders the execution of Soviet decrees State capitalism would be a gigantic step forward even if we paid more than we are paying at present (I took a numerical example deliberately to bring this out more sharply) because it is worth while paying for tuition because it is useful for the workers because victory over disorder economic ruin and laxity is the most important thing because the continuation of the anarchy of small ownership is the greatest the most serious danger and it will certainly be our ruin (unless we overcome it) whereas not only will the payment of a heavier tribute to state capitalism not ruin us it will lead us to socialism by the surest road When

the working class has learned how to defend the state system against the anarchy of small ownership when it has learned to organise large-scale production on a national scale along state capitalist lines it will hold if I may use the expression all the trump cards and the consolidation of socialism will be assured

In the first place *economically* state capitalism is immeasurably superior to our present economic system

In the second place there is nothing terrible in it for Soviet power for the Soviet state is a state in which the power of the workers and the poor is assured The Left Communists failed to understand these unquestionable truths

#### IV

Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science It is inconceivable without planned state organisation which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard in production and distribution

At present petty bourgeois capitalism prevails in Russia and it is *one and the same road* that leads from it to *both* large-scale state capitalism and to socialism *through one and the same* intermediary station called national accounting and control of production and distribution Those who fail to understand this are committing an unpardonable mistake in economics Either they do not know the facts of life do not see what actually exists and are unable to look the truth in the face or they confine themselves to abstractly comparing capitalism with socialism and fail to study the concrete forms and stages of the transition that is taking place in

our country it was not without reason that the teachers of socialism spoke of a whole period of transition from capitalism to socialism and emphasised the prolonged birthpangs of the new society And this new society is again an abstraction which can come into being only by passing through a series of varied imperfect concrete attempts to create this or that socialist state

It is because Russia cannot advance from the economic situation now existing here without traversing the ground which is *common* to state capitalism and to socialism (national accounting and control) that the attempt to frighten others as well as themselves with evolution towards state capitalism (*Kommunist* No 1 p 8 col 1) is utter theoretical nonsense This is letting one's thoughts wander away from the true road of evolution and failing to understand what this road is In practice it is equivalent to pulling us back to small proprietary capitalism

From whatever side we approach the question only one conclusion can be drawn the argument of the Left Communists about the state capitalism which is alleged to be threatening us is an utter mistake in economics and is evident proof that they are complete slaves of petty bourgeois ideology

## V

The following is also extremely instructive  
When we argued with Comrade Bukharin<sup>19</sup> in

<sup>19</sup> *Bukharin N I* (1888-1938) headed a group of "Left Communists" in 1915 took a non Marxist position with regard to a number of questions including the question of state and the right of nations to self determination On the eve of the October 1917 revolution he proposed a plan for the development of the revolution that was based on a rejection of the alliance of the working class and the poor

the Central Executive Committee <sup>20</sup> he declared among other things that on the question of high salaries for specialists we (evidently meaning the Left Communists) were more to the right than Lenin for in this case we saw no deviation from principle bearing in mind Marx's words that under certain conditions it is more expedient for the working class to buy out the whole lot of them (namely the whole lot of capitalists i.e. to buy from the bourgeoisie the land factories works and other means of production)

Bukharin is an extremely well read Marxist economist He therefore remembered that Marx was profoundly right when he taught the workers the importance of preserving the organisation of large-scale production precisely for the purpose of facilitating the transition to socialism Marx taught that

the idea was conceivable of paying the capitalists well of buying them off if the circumstances were such as to compel the capitalists to submit peacefully and to come over to socialism in a cultured and organised fashion provided they were paid

But Bukharin went astray because he did not go deep enough into the specific features of the situa

peasants Bukharin was the author of popular works on political economy and philosophy imperialism and the period of transition from capitalism to socialism which despite their accessibility were marred by the presence of ready made formulas and which completely ignored the real contradictions of the time Lenin criticised Bukharin on many occasions for his lack of understanding of dialectics

<sup>20</sup> *The Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation* was the highest executive body of the Soviets until 1922 when after the formation of the USSR the Central Executive Committee of the USSR was established In the 1936 Constitution the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet was proclaimed the highest executive body and it remains such under the new 1977 Constitution

tion in Russia at the present time—an exceptional situation when we the Russian proletariat are *in advance* of any Britain or any Germany as regards our political order as regards the strength of the workers political power but are *behind* the most backward West European country as regards organising a good state capitalism as regards our level of culture and the degree of material and productive preparedness for the introduction of socialism Is it not clear that the specific nature of the present situation creates the need for a specific type of 'buying out' which the workers must offer to the most cultured the most skilled the most capable organisers among the capitalists who are ready to enter the service of Soviet power and to help honestly in organising state production on the largest possible scale? Is it not clear that in this specific situation we must make every effort to avoid two mistakes both of which are of a petty bourgeois nature? On the one hand it would be a fatal mistake to declare that since there is a discrepancy between our economic forces and our political strength it follows that we should not have seized power

On the other hand it would be an obvious mistake to give free rein to ranters and phrase mongers who allow themselves to be carried away by the dazzling revolutionary spirit but who are incapable of sustained thoughtful and deliberate revolutionary work which takes into account the most difficult stages of transition

the workers know very well that ninety nine per cent of the organisers and first-class technicians of really large-scale and giant enterprises trusts or other establishments belong to the capitalist class But it is precisely these people whom we the proletarian party must appoint to manage the labour process and the organisation of production for there

are no other people who have practical experience in this matter The workers having grown out of the infancy when they could have been misled by

Left phrases or petty bourgeois loose thinking are advancing towards socialism precisely through the capitalist management of trusts through gigantic machine industry through enterprises which have a turnover of several millions per year—only through such a system of production and such enterprises The workers are not petty bourgeois They are not afraid of large scale state capitalism they prize it as their *proletarian* weapon which *their Soviet* power will use against small proprietary disintegration and disorganisation

Only those are worthy of the name of Communists who understand that it is *impossible* to create or introduce socialism *without learning* from the organisers of the trusts For socialism is not a figment of the imagination but the assimilation and application by the proletarian vanguard which has seized power of what has been created by the trusts We the party of the proletariat have *no other way* of acquiring the ability to organise large-scale production on trust lines as trusts are organised except by acquiring it from first class capitalist experts

We have nothing to teach them unless we undertake the childish task of teaching the bourgeois intelligentsia socialism We on the other hand if we are not Communists of infantile age and in faintile understanding must learn from them and there is something to learn for the party of the proletariat and its vanguard have *no experience* of independent work in organising giant enterprises which serve the needs of scores of millions of people

The best workers in Russia have realised this. They have begun to learn from the capitalist organisers the managing engineers and the technicians. They have begun to learn steadily and cautiously with easy things gradually passing on to the more difficult things.

This work of the advanced workers of Russia together with their work of introducing labour discipline has begun and is proceeding quietly unobtrusively without the noise and fuss so necessary to some Lefts. It is proceeding very cautiously and gradually taking into account the lessons of practical experience. This hard work—the work of *learning* practically how to build up large scale production is the guarantee that we are on the right road—the guarantee that the class-conscious workers in Russia are carrying on the struggle against small proprietary disintegration and disorganisation against petty bourgeois indiscipline—the guarantee of the victory of communism.

May 1918

Vol 27 pp 325 51

From  
THE ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND DIFFICULTIES  
OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT

some comrades most devoted and convinced Bolshevik Communists often expressed vehement protests against the fact that for the purpose of organising our socialist Red Army we are utilising the services of the old military experts tsarist generals and officers

The contradiction here is glaring and indignation one might say springs up of its own accord How can we build a socialist army with the aid of tsarist experts?

It turned out that this was the way the only way we did build up an army If we give some thought to the task that has fallen to our lot it will not be difficult to understand that it is the only way we could build it This is not only a military matter it is a task that confronts us in all spheres of everyday life and of the country's economy

The old utopian socialists imagined that socialism could be built by men of a new type that first they would train good pure and splendidly educated people and these would build socialism We always laughed at this and said that this was playing with puppets that it was socialism as an amusement for young ladies but not serious politics

We want to build socialism with the aid of those men and women who grew up under capitalism were depraved and corrupted by capitalism but steeled for the struggle by capitalism There are proletarians who have been so hardened that they can stand a thousand times more hardship than any army There are tens of millions of oppressed peasants ignorant and scattered but capable of uniting around the proletariat in the struggle if the proletariat adopts skilful tactics And there are scientific and technical experts all thoroughly imbued with the bourgeois world outlook there are military experts who were trained under bourgeois conditions if they were only bourgeois it would not be so bad but there were also conditions of landed proprietorship serfdom and the big stick As far as concerns the economy all the agronomists engineers and school teachers were recruited from the propertied class they did not drop from the skies Neither un

der the reign of Tsar Nicholas nor under the Republican President Wilson were the propertyless proletarians at the bench and the peasants at the plough able to get a university education Science and technology exist only for the rich for the propertied class capitalism provides culture only for the minority We must build socialism out of this culture we have no other material We want to start building socialism at once out of the material that capitalism left us yesterday to be used today at this very moment and not with people reared in hot houses assuming that we were to take this fairy tale seriously We have bourgeois experts and nothing else We have no other bricks with which to build Socialism must triumph and we socialists and Communists must prove by deeds that we are capable of building socialism with these bricks with this material that we are capable of building socialist society with the aid of proletarians who have enjoyed the fruits of culture only to an insignificant degree and with the aid of bourgeois specialists

If you do not build communist society with this material you will prove that you are mere phrase-mongers and windbags

### III

By the end of 1918 Communist parties were founded in a number of countries. From the very outset the young communist movement was faced with powerful enemies. It was opposed on the one hand by a well organised armed and politically experienced international bourgeoisie which combined direct suppression of the revolutionary movement of the working class with partial mainly economic concessions to the latter and on the other by opportunist reformist Social Democracy which made use of those insignificant concessions in its preaching for a class peace.

Having declared war on conciliationism and the unprincipled policy of the Right opportunist ideologists many young Communist leaders—and this is quite understandable—went to the other extreme which showed symptoms of sectarianism and Leftism. In exposing the treacherous essence of reformist policies the Left came to reject the very necessity of serious political work among the masses. There were several factors that influenced their attitude—nonacceptance of the old methods of struggle, lack of experience, insufficient theoretical knowledge and a failure to understand that mere recognition of the aims and principles of communism

was not enough to turn the party into a truly influential political force. Carried away by revolutionary enthusiasm they did not realise that in order to win the right to lead the working class and all oppressed people in the struggle against the old world they must first convince working people that their views political programme and tactical slogans were correct. The mistakes of the Left were aggravated as members from petty bourgeois strata with their revolutionary impatience sided with the communist movement.

All this persuaded Lenin despite the fact that he had hardly a minute to spare to undertake the writing of a book which he called *Left wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder*.

Lenin the acknowledged leader of the international working class an embodiment of selfless devotion to the revolutionary cause and of courage and staunchness in the struggle for the emancipation of the working people and a consistent internationalist regarded it as his duty to help Communists overcome the dangerous and in fact petty bourgeois penchant for revolutionary phrase-making and rid themselves of the distorted notion about the development of the revolutionary process. Drawing on the experience of the previous proletarian movement including the experience of three Russian revolutions he showed that petty bourgeois revolutionism which resembled anarchism or borrowed something from the latter and which disregarded on every essential point the conditions and requirements of consistent proletarian class struggle could under certain circumstances deal a heavy blow not only at the parties themselves but at the revolutionary movement as a whole and that a passion for Leftism for its own sake inevitably introduced divisive tendencies into the movement.

The book was a warning against sectarian mistakes. It helped the Communist parties to work out Marxist strategy and tactics to find and use the means of revolutionary struggle that were in conformity with the real distribution of opposing forces to master the scientific principles of political leadership and above all to learn to carry out day by day systematic work among the masses.

But many Leftist groups within Communist parties continued to disregard that essential requirement of Leninism. Towards the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 when the revolutionary movement in Europe was subsiding the Left wing infantile disorder suffered a serious relapse.

Having advanced the so-called theory of the offensive the Leftists with their subjective assessment of events and a desire to leap over the necessary stages of the movement were actually pushing the working class onto the road of premature uprisings which were foredoomed. In this way Left dogmatism became the main danger for the world communist movement.

Lenin's statements articles notes and letters in which problems connected with the ideology policy and tactics of Leftism are dealt with in one or another connection remain timely today for they teach Communists throughout the world the ways of conducting an uncompromising and consistent struggle for truly mass based truly revolutionary Marxist parties of the working class such parties being the political vanguard of the working class.

Included in this section are excerpts from *Left wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder* (April 1920) and from the *Speech in Defence of the Tactics of the Communist International* which Lenin delivered on July 1 1921.

From  
LEFT-WING COMMUNISM -  
AN INFANTILE DISORDER

IV

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WHICH ENEMIES  
WITHIN THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT  
HELPED BOLSHEVISM DEVELOP GAIN  
STRENGTH AND BECOME STEELED

First and foremost the struggle against opportunism which in 1914<sup>21</sup> definitely developed into social chauvinism and definitely sided with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. This aspect of Bolshevik activities is now fairly well known abroad too.

It was however different with Bolshevism's other enemy within the working class movement. Little is known in other countries of the fact that Bolshevism took shape developed and became steeled in the long years of struggle against petty bourgeois revolutionism which smacks of anarchism or borrows something from the latter and in all essential mat-

<sup>21</sup> The year when World War One broke out. Soon an extremely nationalistic and opportunist trend *social chauvinism* developed within the international socialist movement. The main ideologists of that trend were leaders of the Second International (in Russia they were backed by the Mensheviks). Denying the predatory nature of the war unleashed by the world militarist quarters those leaders came out with such reactionary slogans as "Defence of Motherland" and "War until victory is won" and preached for a class peace with the national bourgeoisie. That policy of splitting the forces of the international working class did great harm to the revolutionary movement in Europe.

ters does not measure up to the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle Marxist theory has established—and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed—that the petty proprietor the small master (a social type existing on a very extensive and even mass scale in many European countries) who under capitalism always suffers oppression and very frequently a most acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions of life and even ruin easily goes to revolutionary extremes but is incapable of perseverance organisation discipline and steadfastness The instability of such revolutionism its barrenness and its tendency to turn rapidly into submission apathy phantasms and even a frenzied infatuation with one bourgeois fad or another—all this is common knowledge However a theoretical or abstract recognition of these truths does not at all rid revolutionary parties of old errors which always crop up at unexpected occasions in somewhat new forms in a hitherto unfamiliar garb or surroundings in an unusual—a more or less unusual—situation

Anarchism was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement The two monstrosities complemented each other

When it came into being in 1903 Bolshevism took over the tradition of a ruthless struggle against petty bourgeois semi anarchist (or dilettante-anarchist) revolutionism a tradition which had always existed in revolutionary Social Democracy and had become particularly strong in our country during the years 1900-03 when the foundations for a mass party of the revolutionary proletariat were being laid in Russia Bolshevism took over and carried on the struggle against a party which more than any other

expressed the tendencies of petty bourgeois revolutionism namely the Socialist Revolutionary<sup>22</sup> Party and waged that struggle on three main issues First that party which rejected Marxism stubbornly refused (or it might be more correct to say was unable) to understand the need for a strictly objective appraisal of the class forces and their alignment before taking any political action Second this party considered itself particularly revolutionary or Left because of its recognition of individual terrorism assassination—something that we Marxists emphatically rejected Third the Socialist Revolutionaries thought it very Left to sneer at the comparatively insignificant opportunist sins of the German Social Democratic Party while they themselves imitated the extreme opportunists of that party for example on the agrarian question or on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat

History incidentally has now confirmed on a vast and world wide scale the opinion we have always advocated namely that German *revolutionary* Social Democracy *came closest* to being the party the revolutionary proletariat needs in order to achieve victory Today in 1920 after all the ignominious failures and crises of the war period and the early post war years it can be plainly seen that of all the Western parties the German revolutionary

<sup>22</sup> *Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs)* took shape as a political party in 1902 Posing as spokesmen for the peasantry as a whole they denied the fact that class stratification was under way in the village and that the proletariat was a revolutionary force In 1917 under the influence of the growing revolutionary process a left wing of the SRs emerged Members of this Left wing were fond of ultra revolutionary phrase making and called for extreme measures in politics

Social Democrats produced the finest leaders and recovered and gained new strength more rapidly than the others did. This may be seen in the instances both of the Spartacists<sup>23</sup> and the Left proletarian wing<sup>24</sup> of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany which is waging an incessant struggle against the opportunism. If we now cast a glance to take in a complete historical period namely from the Paris Commune to the first Socialist Soviet Republic we shall find that Marxism's attitude to anarchism in general stands out most definitely and unmistakably. In the final analysis Marxism proved to be correct and although the anarchists rightly pointed to the opportunist views on the state prevalent among most of the socialist parties it must be said first that this opportunism was connected with the distortion and even deliberate suppression of Marx's views on the state (in my book *The State and Revolution* I pointed out that for

<sup>23</sup> Spartacists were members of a revolutionary organisation of the German Left Social Democrats founded by Karl Liebknecht Rosa Luxemburg Franz Mehring Clara Zetkin and Wilhelm Pieck. They conducted revolutionary propaganda among the masses led strikes and exposed the imperialist aims of the world war and the treachery of the opportunist Social Democratic leaders.

<sup>24</sup> In April 1917 the Spartacists joined the centrist *Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany* but preserved their organisational independence. In November 1918 in the course of the revolution in Germany they founded the Spartacus League and after making public their programme on December 14 broke away from the Independents. At a congress held from December 30 1918 to January 1 1919 the Spartacists founded the Communist Party of Germany. In December 1920 most of the Independents joined the Communist Party. Members of the right wing however formed a separate party and adopted the old name—the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany.

thirty six years from 1875 to 1911 Bebel withheld a letter by Engels which very clearly vividly bluntly and definitively exposed the opportunism of the current Social Democratic views on the state<sup>25)</sup> second that the rectification of these opportunist views and the recognition of Soviet power and its superiority to bourgeois parliamentary democracy proceeded most rapidly and extensively among those trends in the socialist parties of Europe and America that were most Marxist

The struggle that Bolshevism waged against Left deviations within its own Party assumed particularly large proportions on two occasions in 1908 on the question of whether or not to participate in a most reactionary parliament<sup>26</sup> and in the legal workers societies which were being restricted by most reactionary laws and again in 1918 (the Treaty of Brest Litovsk) on the question of whether one compromise or another was permissible

In 1908 the Left Bolsheviks were expelled from our Party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary parliament. The Lefts -among whom there were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party-based themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott When

<sup>25</sup> This refers to *Engels's letter to August Bebel* written between March 18 and 28 1875 Bebel (1840 1913) was a prominent figure of German Social Democracy and the international working class movement

<sup>26</sup> The reference is to the *State Duma* a legislative institution with limited powers which was established in Russia by order of the tsar under public pressure during the first bourgeois democratic revolution of 1905 07 There were Bolshevik Deputies in the Second (1907) Third (1907 12) and Fourth (1912 17) Dumas

in August 1905 the tsar proclaimed the convocation of a consultative parliament the Bolsheviks called for its boycott in the teeth of all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks<sup>27</sup> and the parliament was in fact swept away by the revolution of October 1905 The boycott proved correct at the time not because non participation in reactionary parliaments is correct in general but because we accurately appraised the objective situation which was leading to the rapid development of the mass strikes first into a political strike then into a revolutionary strike and finally an uprising

The Bolsheviks boycott of parliament in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that when legal and illegal parliamentary and non parliamentary forms of struggle are combined it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms It would however be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly imitatively and uncritically to other conditions and other situations Today when we look back at this fully completed historical period whose connection with subsequent periods has now become quite clear it becomes most obvious that in 1908 14 the Bolsheviks could not

<sup>27</sup> The Mensheviks were members of the Menshevik Party representatives of the opportunist trend in Russian Social Democracy that took shape in 1903 They found support mainly among members of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the middle strata of the intelligentsia During the 1905 07 revolution the Mensheviks opposed the alliance of the working class and the peasantry and favoured agreement with the liberal bourgeoisie and its hegemony in the revolution In the years of the First World War they took the chauvinistic position of defence of the Motherland On the eve of the October 1917 revolution they went over to the side of the counter revolutionary bourgeoisie

*have* preserved (let alone strengthened and developed) the core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat had they not upheld in a most strenuous struggle the viewpoint that it was *obligatory* to combine legal and illegal forms of struggle and that it was *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions hemmed in by reactionary laws (sick benefit societies etc )

In 1918 things did not reach a split At that time the Left Communists formed only a separate group or faction within our Party and that not for long In the same year 1918 the most prominent representatives of Left Communism openly acknowledged their error

To reject compromises on principle to reject the permissibility of compromises in general no matter of what kind is childishness which it is difficult even to consider seriously A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must be able to distinguish *concrete* cases of compromises that are inexcusable and are an expression of opportunism and *treachery* he must direct all the force of criticism the full intensity of merciless exposure and relentless war against *these concrete* compromises

There are different kinds of compromises One must be able to analyse the situation and the concrete conditions of each compromise or of each variety of compromise However anyone who is out to think up for the workers some kind of recipe that will provide them with cut and-dried solutions for all contingencies or promises that the policy of the revolutionary proletariat will never come up against difficult or complex situations is simply a charlatan.

## VIII

### NO COMPROMISES?

we have seen how emphatically the Lefts <sup>28</sup> have advanced this slogan It is sad to see people who no doubt consider themselves Marxists and want to be Marxists forget the fundamental truths of Marxism

Of course to very young and inexperienced revolutionaries as well as to petty bourgeois revolutionaries of even very respectable age and great experience it seems extremely dangerous incomprehensible and wrong to permit compromises Many sophists (being unusually or excessively experienced politicians) reason exactly in the same way as the British leaders of opportunism mentioned by Comrade Lansbury<sup>29</sup> If the Bolsheviks are permitted a certain compromise why should we not be permitted any kind of compromise? Every proletarian has been through strikes and has experienced compromises with the hated oppressors and exploiters when the workers have had to return to work either without having achieved anything or else agreeing to only a partial satisfaction of their demands Every proletarian—as a result of the conditions of the mass struggle and the acute intensification of class antagonisms he lives among—sees the difference between a compromise enforced by ob

<sup>28</sup> The reference is to the group of "ultra Lefts which broke away from the Communist Party of Germany in 1919 The group which called itself the Communist Worker Party of Germany sought to impose its sectarian anarchist syndicalist principles and aims on the international communist and workers movement

<sup>29</sup> Lansbury George (1859 1940)—one of the leaders of the British Labour Party

jective conditions (such as lack of strike funds no outside support starvation and exhaustion)—a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise—and on the other hand a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self interest (strike breakers also enter into compromises !) their cowardice desire to toady to the capitalists and readiness to yield to intimidation sometimes to persuasion sometimes to sops and sometimes to flattery from the capitalists

Of course in politics where it is sometimes a matter of extremely complex relations—national and international—between classes and parties very many cases will arise that will be much more difficult than the question of a legitimate compromise in a strike or a treacherous compromise by a strike-breaker treacherous leader etc It would be absurd to formulate a recipe or general rule ( No compromises! ) to suit all cases One must use one's own brains and be able to find one's bearings in each particular instance It is in fact one of the functions of a party organisation and of party leaders worthy of the name to acquire through the prolonged persistent variegated and comprehensive efforts of all thinking representatives of a given class <sup>30</sup> the knowledge experience and—in addition

<sup>30</sup> Within every class even in the conditions prevailing in the most enlightened countries even within the most advanced class and even when the circumstances of the moment have aroused all its spiritual forces to an exceptional degree there always are—and inevitably will be as long as classes exist as long as a classless society has not fully consolidated itself and has not developed on its own foundations—representatives of the class who do not think and are incapable of thinking for themselves Capitalism would not be the oppressor of the masses that it actually is if things were otherwise [Lenin's own note—Ed]

to knowledge and experience—the political flair necessary for the speedy and correct solution of complex political problems

Naive and quite inexperienced people imagine that the permissibility of compromise *in general* is sufficient to obliterate any distinction between opportunism against which we are waging and must wage an unremitting struggle and revolutionary Marxism or communism But if such people do not yet know that in nature and in society *all* distinctions are fluid and up to a certain point conventional nothing can help them but lengthy training education enlightenment and political and everyday experience

All compromise with other parties any policy of manoeuvring and compromise must be emphatically rejected the German Lefts write

It is surprising that with such views these Lefts do not emphatically condemn Bolshevism! After all the German Lefts cannot but know that the entire history of Bolshevism both before and after the October Revolution is *full* of instances of changes of tack conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties including bourgeois parties!

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie a war which is a hundred times more difficult protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states and to renounce in advance any change of tack or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary unstable vacillating or conditional allies)—is that not ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not like making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain and refusing in advance ever to move in zigzags ever to retrace one's

steps or ever to abandon a course once selected and to try others?

After the first socialist revolution of the proletariat and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie in some country the proletariat of that country remains *for a long time weaker* than the bourgeoisie simply because of the latter's extensive international links and also because of the spontaneous and continuous restoration and regeneration of capitalism and the bourgeoisie by the small commodity producers of the country which has overthrown the bourgeoisie. The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort and by the most thorough careful attentive skilful and *obligatory* use of any even the smallest rift between the enemies any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries and also by taking advantage of any even the smallest opportunity of winning a mass ally even though this ally is temporary vacillating unstable unreliable and conditional Those who do not understand this reveal a failure to understand even the smallest grain of Marxism of modern scientific socialism *in general*

the attacks made by the German Lefts against the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a bloc with the Independents (the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany—the Kautskyites<sup>31</sup>) are absolute

<sup>31</sup> *Kautskyism* (or Centrism)—a political trend named after its ideologist, Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) a leader and theoretician of German Social Democracy and the Second International (see footnote on p. 72). The Kautskvites tried and failed both in theory and in practice to combine Marxism and opportunism.

ly insane in our opinion and clear proof that the Lefts are in the *wrong*

The German Independent Social Democratic Party is obviously not a homogeneous body. Alongside the old opportunist leaders there has emerged in this party a Left and proletarian wing which is growing most rapidly. This proletarian wing has already proposed—at the Leipzig Congress of the Independents (1919)—immediate and unconditional affiliation to the Third International.<sup>32</sup> To fear a compromise with this wing of the party is positively ridiculous. On the contrary it is the *duty* of Communists to seek and find a suitable form of compromise with them a compromise which on the one hand will facilitate and accelerate the necessary complete fusion with this wing and on the other will in no way hamper the Communists in their ideological and political struggle against the opportunist Right wing of the Independents. It will probably be no easy matter to devise a suitable form of compromise—but only a charlatan could promise the

\* The Third Communist International (Comintern) was founded in 1919. By that time Communist parties and groups existed in many countries and the task was to unite these scattered detachments of the Communist movement in one organisation. This took place at the First (Inaugural) conference held in Moscow from March 2 to 6 1919. The conference passed a resolution on constituting itself as the Third International and taking the name of the Communist International. Adopting revolutionary Marxism as its ideological platform the Comintern fought uncompromisingly against social reformism which was the guiding spirit of the Second International. Lenin made a great contribution to the drafting of the Comintern's organisational and theoretical principles. The Comintern held seven congresses. At its last congress in 1933 it set the task before the Communist parties of creating a united workers and popular front to combat fascism and war. The Comintern was dissolved in 1943 during the Second World War.

## **German workers and the German Communists an easy road to victory**

Capitalism would not be capitalism if the proletariat *pur sang* were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletarian and the semi proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labour power) between the semi proletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan handicraft worker and small master in general) between the small peasant and the middle peasant and so on and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata if it were not divided according to territorial origin trade sometimes according to religion and so on From all this follows the necessity the absolute necessity for the Communist Party the vanguard of the proletariat its class-conscious section to resort to changes of tack to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians with the various parties of the workers and small masters It is entirely a matter of *knowing how* to apply these tactics in order to raise—not lower—the *general* level of proletarian class-consciousness revolutionary spirit and ability to fight and win

## **X**

### **SEVERAL CONCLUSIONS**

The history of the working class movement now shows that in all countries it is about to go through (and is already going through) a struggle waged by communism-emergent gaining strength and advancing towards victory—against primarily Menshevism i.e. opportunism and social-chauvinism

(the home brand in each particular country) and then as a complement so to say Left wing communism The former struggle has developed in all countries apparently without any exception as a duel between the Second International<sup>33</sup> (already virtually dead) and the Third International The latter struggle is to be seen in Germany Great Britain Italy America (at any rate a certain section of the Industrial Workers of the World and of the anarcho-syndicalist trends uphold the errors of Left wing communism alongside of an almost universal and almost unreserved acceptance of the Soviet system) and in France (the attitude of a section of the former syndicalists towards the political party and parliamentarianism also alongside of the acceptance of the Soviet system) in other words the struggle is undoubtedly being waged not only on an international but even on a worldwide scale

But while the working class movement is everywhere going through what is actually the same kind of preparatory school for victory over the bourgeoisie it is achieving that development in its own way in each country

It is now essential that Communists of every country should quite consciously take into account both the fundamental objectives of the struggle against opportunism and Left doctrinairism and

<sup>33</sup> *The Second International* an international association of workers parties was founded in 1889 at a time when the working class movement was going over to a new historical stage in its development That was the period when political parties of the working class were springing up in many countries of Europe and in the United States With the outbreak of the First World War the Second International collapsed because the opportunist leaders of most member parties betraying the interests of the proletariat openly supported the imperialist aggressive policies of their countries governments and called for the continuation of the war until victory was won

the *concrete features* which this struggle assumes and must inevitably assume in each country in conformity with the specific character of its economics politics culture and national composition (Ireland etc) its colonies religious divisions and so on and so forth Dissatisfaction with the Second International is felt everywhere and is spreading and growing both because of its opportunism and because of its inability or incapacity to create a really centralised and really leading centre capable of directing the international tactics of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for a world Soviet republic It should be clearly realised that such a leading centre can never be built up on stereotyped mechanically equated and identical tactical rules of struggle. As long as national and state distinctions exist among peoples and countries the unity of the international tactics of the communist working class movement in all countries demands not the elimination of variety or the suppression of national distinctions (which is a pipe dream at present) but the application of the *fundamental* principles of communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) which will *correctly modify* these principles in certain *particulars* correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state distinctions To seek out investigate predict and grasp that which is nationally specific and nationally distinctive in the *concrete manner* in which each country should tackle a *single* international task victory over opportunism and Left doctrinairism within the working-class movement the overthrow of the bourgeoisie the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship—such is the basic task in the historical period that all the advanced countries (and not they alone) are going through

The proletarian vanguard has been won over ideo-

logically That is the main thing Without this not even the first step towards victory can be made But that is still quite a long way from victory Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone To throw only the vanguard into the decisive battle before the entire class the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support for the vanguard or at least of sympathetic neutrality towards it and of precluded support for the enemy would be not merely foolish but criminal Propaganda and agitation alone are not enough for an entire class the broad masses of the working people those oppressed by capital to take up such a stand For that the masses must have their own political experience

The immediate objective of the class-conscious vanguard of the international working class movement i.e. the Communist parties groups and trends is to be able to *lead* the broad masses (who are still for the most part apathetic inert dormant and convention ridden) to their new position or rather to be able to lead *not only* their own party but also these masses in their advance and transition to the new position a new position can not be reached without the liquidation of Left doctrinairism and without a full elimination of its errors

History as a whole and the history of revolutions in particular is always richer in content more varied more multiform more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes This can readily be understood because even the finest of vanguards express the class consciousness will passion and imagination of tens of thousands whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities revolutions are

made by the class-consciousness will passion and imagination of tens of millions spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes Two very important practical conclusions follow from this first that in order to accomplish its task the revolutionary class must be able to master *all* forms or aspects of social activity without exception (completing after the capture of political power—sometimes at great risk and with very great danger—what it did not complete before the capture of power) second that the revolutionary class must be prepared for the most rapid and brusque replacement of one form by another

Unless we learn to apply all the methods of struggle we may suffer grave and sometimes even decisive defeat if changes beyond our control in the position of the other classes bring to the forefront a form of activity in which we are especially weak If however we learn to use all the methods of struggle victory will be certain because we represent the interests of the really foremost and really revolutionary class even if circumstances do not permit us to make use of weapons that are most dangerous to the enemy weapons that deal the swiftest mortal blows Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist because in this field the bourgeoisie has most frequently deceived and duped the workers (particularly in peaceful and non revolutionary times) while illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary That however is wrong The truth is that those parties and leaders are opportunists and traitors to the working class that are unable or unwilling (do not say I cant say I shant ) to use illegal methods of struggle in conditions such as those which prevailed for example during the imperialist war of 1914 18 when the bourgeoisie of the freest de-

mocratic countries most brazenly and brutally deceived the workers and smothered the truth about the predatory character of the war But revolutionaries who are incapable of combining illegal forms of struggle with *every* form of legal struggle are poor revolutionaries indeed It is not difficult to be a revolutionary when revolution has already broken out and is in spate when all people are joining the revolution just because they are carried away because it is the vogue and sometimes even from careerist motives After its victory the proletariat has to make most strenuous efforts even the most painful so as to liberate itself from such pseudo revolutionaries It is far more difficult—and far more precious—to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct open really mass and really revolutionary struggle *do not yet exist* to be able to champion the interests of the revolution (by propaganda agitation and organisation) in non revolutionary bodies and quite often in downright reactionary bodies in a non revolutionary situation among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action

I have neither the time nor the space here to describe the Russian Bolshevik methods of participation in parliamentary elections and in the parliamentary struggle I can however assure foreign Communists that they were quite unlike the usual West European parliamentary campaigns From this the conclusion is often drawn Well that was in Russia in our country parliamentarianism is different This is a false conclusion Communists adherents of the Third International in all countries exist for the purpose of *changing*—all along the line in all spheres of life—the old socialist trade unionist syndicalist and parliamentary type of work into a

*new* type of work the communist In Russia too there was always an abundance of opportunism purely bourgeois sharp practices and capitalist rigging in the elections In Western Europe and in America the Communists must learn to create a new uncus tomary non-opportunist and non careerist parliamentarianism the Communist parties must issue their slogans true proletarians with the help of the unorganised and downtrodden poor should distribute leaflets canvass workers houses and cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages (fortunately there are many times fewer remote villages in Europe than in Russia and in Britain the number is very small) they should go into the public houses penetrate into unions societies and chance gatherings of the common people and speak to the people not in learned (or very parliamentary) language they should not at all strive to get seats in parliament but should everywhere try to get people to think and draw the masses into the struggle to take the bourgeoisie at its word and utilise the machinery it has set up the elections it has appointed and the appeals it has made to the people they should try to explain to the people what Bolshevism *is* in a way that was never possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times (exclusive of course of times of big strikes when in Russia a *similar* apparatus for widespread popular agitation worked even more intensively) It is very difficult to do this in Western Europe and extremely difficult in America but it can and must be done for the objectives of communism cannot be achieved without effort We must work to accomplish *practical* tasks ever more varied and ever more closely connected with all branches of social life *winning* branch after branch and sphere after sphere *from the bourgeoisie*

Since the proletarian revolution in Russia and its victories on an international scale expected neither by the bourgeoisie nor the philistines the entire world has become different and the bourgeoisie everywhere has become different too It is terrified of Bolshevism exasperated by it almost to the point of frenzy and for that very reason it is on the one hand precipitating the progress of events and on the other concentrating on the forcible suppression of Bolshevism thereby weakening its own position in a number of other fields In their tactics the Communists in all the advanced countries must take both these circumstances into account

When the French bourgeoisie makes Bolshevism the central issue in the elections and accuses the comparatively moderate or vacillating socialists of being Bolsheviks when the American bourgeoisie which has completely lost its head seizes thousands and thousands of people on suspicion of Bolshevism creates an atmosphere of panic and broad casts stories of Bolshevik plots when despite all its wisdom and experience the British bourgeoisie—the most solid in the world—makes incredible blunders founds richly endowed anti Bolshevik societies creates a special literature on Bolshevism and recruits an extra number of scientists agitators and clergymen to combat it we must salute and thank the capitalists They are working for us They are helping us to get the masses interested in the essence and significance of Bolshevism and they can not do otherwise for they have already failed to ignore Bolshevism and stifle it

Communism is emerging in positively every sphere of public life its beginnings are to be seen literally on all sides The contagion (to use the favourite metaphor of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois police the one mostly to their liking) has

very thoroughly penetrated the organism and has completely permeated it If special efforts are made to block one of the channels the contagion will find another one sometimes very unexpectedly Life will assert itself Communists should know that in any case the future belongs to them therefore we can (and must) combine the most intense passion in the great revolutionary struggle with the coolest and most sober appraisal of the frenzied ravings of the bourgeoisie in all countries communism is becoming steeled and is growing its roots are so deep that persecution does not weaken or debilitate it but only strengthens it Only one thing is lacking to enable us to march forward more confidently and firmly to victory namely the universal and thorough awareness of all Communists in all countries of the necessity to display the utmost *flexibility* in their tactics

That which happened to such leaders of the Second International such highly erudite Marxists devoted to socialism as Kautsky Otto Bauer<sup>34</sup> and others could (and should) provide a useful lesson They fully appreciated the need for flexible tactics they themselves learned Marxist dialectic and taught it to others (and much of what they have done in this field will always remain a valuable contribution to socialist literature) however *in the application* of this dialectic they committed such an error or proved to be so undialectical in practice so incapable of taking into account the rapid change

<sup>34</sup> Bauer Otto (1882 1938)—a leader of Austrian Social Democracy and the Second International and an ideologist of reformism He was the author of a number of books on social and political subjects in which he showed a lack of understanding of the essence of the Russian revolution of 1917 Towards the end of his life however he acknowledged the historical importance of the revolution and the achievements of the USSR

of forms and the rapid acquisition of new content by the old forms that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndman<sup>35</sup> Guesde<sup>36</sup> and Plekhanov<sup>37</sup> The principal reason for their bank

<sup>35</sup> *Hyndman Henry Mayers* (1842 1921)—one of the ideologists of the socialist movement in Britain advocated reforms and rejected strikes as a means of struggle represented the extreme right wing in the Second International and conducted a policy which was hostile to revolutionary Marxism an enemy of the Russian revolution he called for an armed intervention against Soviet Russia

<sup>36</sup> *Guesde Jules* (1845 1922)—one of the organisers and leaders of the socialist movement in France A brilliant publicist and speaker he did a great deal to popularise Marxism in his country At the beginning he fought against petty bourgeois trends in the workers movement in particular against anarchism But even then Guesde reduced the role of the workers party which he founded in 1879 to propagating socialist ideals and failed to combine these ideals with the day to-day struggle of the working class Later he became an advocate of centrism During the First World War Guesde called for unity with the bourgeoisie and took the social chauvinist position of "defence of Motherland In his last years he gave up active political work

<sup>37</sup> *Plekhanov Georgi V* (1856 1918)—an outstanding figure in the Russian and international working class movement and one of the first exponents of Marxism in Russia In 1883 he founded the Emancipation of Labour group the first Russian Marxist group in Geneva From 1883 to 1903 he wrote a number of works which popularised the teaching of Marx and Engels But even then he held erroneous views which later led to his reconciliation with opportunism Thus during the first Russian revolution of 1905 07 he supported the Mensheviks on all questions concerning the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary movement During the First World War Plekhanov adopted a social chauvinist stand Back in Russia after the February 1917 bourgeois-democratic revolution he headed the extreme right-wing group of the so-called Menshevik "defencists" and came out against the Bolsheviks and against the socialist revolution Lenin pointed out the importance of Plekhanov's theoretical works and his role in popularising Marxism in Russia but at the same time Lenin criticised

ruptcy was that they were hypnotised by a definite form of growth of the working class movement and socialism forgot all about the one-sidedness of that form were afraid to see the break up which objective conditions made inevitable and continued to repeat simple and at first glance uncontested axioms that had been learned by rote like three is more than two But politics is more like algebra than arithmetic and still more like higher than elementary mathematics In reality all the old forms of the socialist movement have acquired a new content and consequently a new symbol the minus sign has appeared in front of all the figures our wiseacres however have stubbornly continued (and still continue) to persuade themselves and others that minus three is more than minus two

We must see to it that Communists do not make a similar mistake only in the opposite sense or rather we must see to it that a *similar mistake* only made in the opposite sense by the Left Communists is corrected as soon as possible and eliminated as rapidly and painlessly as possible It is not only Right doctrinairism that is erroneous Left doctrinairism is erroneous too Of course the mistake of Left doctrinairism in communism is at present a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than that of Right doctrinairism (i e social-chauvinism and Kautskyism) but after all that is only due to the fact that Left communism is a very young trend is only just coming into being It is only for this reason that under certain conditions the disease can be easily eradicated and we must set to work with the utmost energy to eradicate it

April 1920

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Plekhanov for his retreat from Marxism and for his political mistakes

THIRD CONGRESS  
OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL  
JUNE 22-JULY 12, 1921

From  
SPEECH IN DEFENCE  
OF THE TACTICS  
OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL  
JULY 1

Comrades! I deeply regret that I must confine myself to self defence (*Laughter*) I say deeply regret because after acquainting myself with Comrade Terracini's<sup>38</sup> speech and the amendments introduced by three delegations<sup>39</sup> I should very much like to take the offensive for properly speaking offensive operations are essential against the views defended by Terracini and these three delegations If the Congress is not going to wage a vigorous offensive against such errors against such Leftist stupidities the whole movement is doomed That is my deep conviction But we are organised and disciplined Marxists In drawing up our plans we must proceed in an organised way and try to find the correct line Our theses put forward by the Russian delegation were studied and prepared in the most careful way and were the result of long

<sup>38</sup> *Terracini Umberto* (b 1895)—a prominent figure of the working class movement in Italy and one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party Lenin's criticism of Left dogmatism helped Terracini to overcome his left sectarian mistakes

<sup>39</sup> Here Lenin had in mind the delegations of the Communist Parties of Germany Austria and Italy

arguments and meetings with various delegations They aim at establishing the basic line of the Communist International Now when Terracini comes forward and says that we must continue the fight against the Centrists and goes on to tell how it is intended to wage the fight I say that if these amendments denote a definite trend a relentless fight against this trend is essential for otherwise there is no communism and no Communist International I am surprised that the German Communist Workers Party <sup>40</sup> has not put its signature to these amendments (*Laughter*) Indeed just listen to what Terracini is defending and what his amendments say They begin in this way On page 1 column 1 line 19 the word majority should be deleted Then further instead of the words basic propositions insert aims Basic propositions and aims are two different things even the anarchists will agree with us about aims because they too stand for the abolition of exploitation and class distinctions

I have met and talked with few anarchists in my life but all the same I have seen enough of them I sometimes succeeded in reaching agreement with them about aims but never as regards principles Principles are not an aim a programme a tactic or a theory Tactics and theory are not principles How do we differ from the anarchists on principles? The principles of communism consist in the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and in the use of state coercion in the transition period Such are the principles of communism but they are not its aim And the comrades who have tabled this proposal have made a mistake

Secondly it is stated there the word majority should be deleted Read the whole passage

<sup>40</sup> See footnote 28 on p 66 —Ed

The Third Congress of the Communist International is setting out to review questions of tactics under conditions when in a whole number of countries the objective situation has become aggravated in a revolutionary sense and when a whole number of communist mass parties have been organised which incidentally in their actual revolutionary struggle have nowhere taken into their hands the virtual leadership of the majority of the working class

And so they want the word majority deleted If we cannot agree on such simple things then I do not understand how we can work together and lead the proletariat to victory Then it is not at all surprising that we cannot reach agreement on the question of principles either Show me a party which has already won the majority of the working class Terracini did not even think of adducing any example Indeed there is no such example

And so the word aims is to be put instead of principles and the word majority is to be deleted No thank you! We shall not do it Even the German party—one of the best—does not have the majority of the working class behind it That is a fact We who face a most severe struggle are not afraid to utter this truth but here you have three delegations who wish to begin with an untruth for if the Congress deletes the word majority it will show that it wants an untruth That is quite clear

Then comes the following amendment On page 4 column 1 line 10 the words Open Letter <sup>41</sup> etc

<sup>41</sup> The Open Letter ('Offener Brief') of the CPG Central Committee of January 8 1921 in which the Communist Party of Germany called on all workers socialist organisations and trade unions to unite their forces and wage a struggle against the growing reaction and the capitalists offensive against the working people's vital rights The programme of joint action proposed by the Communists provided for higher pensions for disabled war veterans elimination of unemployment an improvement of the country's financial situation control by factory and plant committees

should be deleted I have already heard one speech today in which I found the same idea But there it was quite natural It was the speech of Comrade Hempel a member of the German Communist Workers Party He said The Open Letter was an act of opportunism To my deep regret and shame I have already heard such views privately But when at the Congress after such prolonged debate the

Open Letter is declared opportunist—that is a shame and a disgrace! And now Comrade Terracini comes forward on behalf of the three delegations and wants to delete the words Open Letter What is the good then of the fight against the German Communist Workers Party? The Open Letter is a model political step This is stated in our theses and we must certainly stand by it It is a model because it is the first act of a practical method of winning over the majority of the working class In Europe where almost all the proletarians are organised we must win the majority of the working class and anyone who fails to understand this is lost to the communist movement he will never learn anything if he has failed to learn that much during the three years of the great revolution

On the basis of my experience I must say although I am taking up a defensive position (*laugh ter*) that the aim and the principle of my speech consist in defence of the resolution and theses proposed by our delegation It would of course be pedantic to say that not a letter in them must be al-

over all stocks of food raw materials and fuel the restart ing of all closed enterprises joint control by the peasants councils and the organisations of farm labourers over sow ing harvesting and marketing of farm produce immediate disarming and dissolution of all bourgeois armed organisa tions the setting up of workers self defence groups am nesty for all political prisoners and immediate restora tion of trade and diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia

tered I have had to read many resolutions and I am well aware that very good amendments could be introduced in every line of them But that would be pedantry If nevertheless I declare now that in a political sense not a single letter can be altered it is because the amendments as I see them are of a quite definite political nature and because they lead us along a path that is harmful and dangerous to the Communist International We have not only condemned our Right wing elements—we have expelled them But if like Terracini people turn the fight against the Rightists into a sport then we must say Stop! Otherwise the danger will become too grave!

Terracini has defended the theory of an offensive struggle In this connection the notorious amendments propose a formula two or three pages long There is no need for us to read them We know what they say Terracini has stated the issue quite clearly He has defended the theory of an offensive pointing out dynamic tendencies and the transition from passivity to activity Dynamic tendencies transition from passivity to activity — these are all phrases The line of reasoning followed in the proposed amendments is an impossible one because they contain no Marxism no political experience and no reasoning Have we in our theses elaborated a general theory of the revolutionary offensive? We have spoken of the theory of an offensive in relation to a quite definite country and at a quite definite period

Is it really possible for a party to dispute whether a revolutionary offensive is permissible in general? To find such examples in this country one would have to go back some fifteen years If there are Centrists or disguised Centrists who dispute the theory of the offensive they should be immediately

expelled That question cannot give rise to disputes But the fact that even now after three years of the Communist International we are arguing about dynamic tendencies about the transition from passivity to activity —that is a shame and a disgrace

The slogan of the First and Second congresses<sup>42</sup> was Down with the Centrists! We cannot hope to master even the ABC of communism unless all along the line and throughout the world we make short shrift of the Centrists and semi-Centrists whom in Russia we call Mensheviks Our first task is to create a genuinely revolutionary party and to break with the Mensheviks We are already convening the Third Congress and Comrade Terracini keeps saying that the task consists in hunting out pursuing and exposing Centrists and semi-Centrists No thank you! We have already done this long enough At the Second Congress we said that the Centrists are our enemies But we must go forward really The second stage after organising into a party consists in learning to prepare for revolution In many countries we have not even learned how to assume the leadership We were victorious in Russia not only because the undisputed majority of the working class was on our side (during the elections in 1917 the overwhelming majority of the workers were with us against the Mensheviks) but also because half the army immediately after our seizure of power and nine-tenths of the peasants in the course of some weeks came over to our side we were victorious because we adopted the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries instead

<sup>42</sup> The First Congress of the Communist International was held at the beginning of March 1919 and the Second Congress at the end of July and the beginning of August 1920

of our own and put it into effect Our victory lay in the fact that we carried out the Socialist Revolutionary programme that is why this victory was so easy In spite of the fact that the majority so rapidly came to be on our side the difficulties confronting us after our victory were very great Nevertheless we won through because we kept in mind not only our aims but also our principles and did not tolerate in our Party those who kept silent about principles but talked of aims dynamic tendencies and the transition from passivity to activity Throughout our theses speak of the masses But comrades we need to understand what is meant by masses The German Communist Workers Party the Left wing comrades misuse this word But Comrade Terracini too and all those who have signed these amendments do not know how the word masses should be read

the concept of masses is one that changes in accordance with the changes in the nature of the struggle At the beginning of the struggle it took only a few thousand genuinely revolutionary workers to warrant talk of the masses If the party succeeds in drawing into the struggle not only its own members if it also succeeds in arousing non party people it is well on the way to winning the masses During our revolutions there were instances when several thousand workers represented the masses In the history of our movement and of our struggle against the Mensheviks you will find many examples where several thousand workers in a town were enough to give a clearly mass character to the movement You have a mass when several thousand non party workers who usually live a philistine life and drag out a miserable existence and who have never heard anything about politics begin to act in a revolutionary way If the movement spreads and

intensifies it gradually develops into a real revolution. When the revolution has been sufficiently prepared the concept masses becomes different several thousand workers no longer constitute the masses. This word begins to denote something else. The concept of masses undergoes a change so that it implies the majority and not simply a majority of the workers alone but the majority of all the exploited. Any other kind of interpretation is impermissible for a revolutionary and any other sense of the word becomes incomprehensible. It is possible that even a small party the British or American party for example after it has thoroughly studied the course of political development and become acquainted with the life and customs of the non party masses will at a favourable moment evoke a revolutionary movement. You will have a mass movement if such a party comes forward with its slogans at such a moment and succeeds in getting millions of workers to follow it. I would not altogether deny that a revolution can be started by a very small party and brought to a victorious conclusion. But one must have a knowledge of the methods by which the masses can be won over. For this thoroughgoing preparation of revolution is essential. But here you have comrades coming forward with the assertion that we should immediately give up the demand for big masses. They must be challenged what is essential to win and retain power is not only the majority of the working class—I use the term working class in its West European sense i.e. in the sense of the industrial proletariat—but also the majority of the working and exploited rural population. Have you thought about this? Do we find in Terracini's speech even a hint at this thought? He speaks only of dynamic tendency and the transition from passivity to activity.

And so I repeat I must unreservedly defend our theses and I feel I am bound to do it We not only condemned the Centrists but expelled them from the Party Now we must deal with another aspect which we also consider dangerous We must tell the comrades the truth in the most polite form (and in our theses it is told in a kind and considerate way) so that no one feels insulted we are confronted now by other more important questions than that of attacks on the Centrists We have had enough of this question It has already become somewhat boring Instead the comrades ought to learn to wage a real revolutionary struggle The German workers have already begun this Hundreds of thousands of proletarians in that country<sup>43</sup> have been fighting heroically Anyone who opposes this struggle should be immediately expelled But after that we must not engage in empty word spinning but must immediately begin to learn on the basis of the mistakes made how to organise the struggle better We must not conceal our mistakes from the enemy Anyone who is afraid of this is no revolutionary On the con

<sup>43</sup> The reference is to an armed uprising of the proletariat in Middle Germany in March 1921 The German bourgeoisie alarmed by the growing influence of the Communists decided to provoke the vanguard of the proletariat into launching a premature armed uprising and in this way to destroy revolutionary organisations of the working class Under the pretext of fighting criminal elements the police was brought into factories and plants of Middle Germany The provocative action of the authorities aroused tumultuous indignation among workers resulting in clashes with the police

Despite the workers heroic struggle the March uprising was quelled and the Communist party and the working class suffered a severe blow One of the main reasons why the uprising failed was the treacherous policy of splitting and disuniting of forces conducted by right wing Social Democrats and reformist trade union leaders

trary if we openly declare to the workers Yes we have made mistakes it will mean that they will not be repeated and we shall be able better to choose the moment And if during the struggle itself the majority of the working people prove to be on our side—not only the majority of the workers but the majority of all the exploited and oppressed—then we shall really be victorious

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## IV

An excerpt from Lenin's article *The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism* written for the fourth anniversary of the socialist revolution (1921) concludes this collection

Having endured the trials of the Civil War unleashed by domestic counter revolution and of an armed intervention by 14 states the aim of which was to strangle the young socialist republic having survived not only the stress of bloody battles but also famine epidemics and economic dislocation the people of Soviet Russia began peaceful construction

In working out the general direction of the country's advance toward socialism Lenin at the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 undertook the task of translating into concrete terms the economic policy of the Party and the state and of bringing it into accord with the conditions of a peaceful stage in the country's development Overcoming opposition from various Leftists who failed to understand the urgent need for formulating a correct policy in a rapidly changing situation Lenin pointed again and again to the Marxist principle calling for a dynamic approach in policy making In the specific situation of that time this meant a change from

the policy of war communism to NEP (new economic policy)

War communism with its severe restrictions and extraordinary economic measures was necessary in order to ensure uninterrupted food supplies for the Red Army fighting at the civil war fronts and for the famine-stricken industrial centres that provided the army with weapons and ammunition But by 1921 it has outlived its usefulness

The Left -Trotskyites and anarchist syndicalist groups-refused to acknowledge the fact that the establishment of normal mutually acceptable relations between town and country had become an urgent task To carry out this task it was necessary to allow the peasants to sell their surplus product at market prices that is to say to provide to them material incentives for raising productivity The ultra-revolutionaries regarded NEP as a betrayal of principles deviation from the revolutionary trajectory and a return to capitalism

They showed similar political obtuseness on another vital issue—the building of socialism's economic foundations There was only one way to do this in a country where small commodity forms of economy prevailed and which was encircled by hostile capitalist states and that was to build the material and technical guarantees of independence in the historically shortest time For this it was necessary in the first place to industrialise the country i.e to create a heavy industry with no outside and When it came to the question of financing the industrialisation, the 'Left' showing complete ignorance on the question of the worker peasant alliance set forth an adventurous plan calling for the exploitation of the village or as they themselves put it, exploitation of pre socialist forms of economy According to these plans, the financial means for industrialisa-

tion were to be derived from higher agricultural taxes and higher prices for industrial goods

Lenin demolished these theoretically weak and practically dangerous schemes and completely rejected the leftist view that the dictatorship of the proletariat meant the imposition of the will of the proletariat on the rest of the population—in this instance on many millions of peasants Lenin had always held that a proletarian state must represent the whole society and take into account the interests of all other classes The New Economic Policy was an example of this attitude

In *The Importance of Gold* Lenin showed that the political thinking of the Left was extremely narrow and that their understanding of the ways and means of building socialism was crude and superficial

Revolutionary politician scholar and statesman Lenin was able to find the correct way in dealing with the most complicated situations during some of the most crucial moments in the nation's history And he taught this to the Communist party which he founded three quarters of a century ago a party which together with the people has gone through years of achievement and years of ordeal a party which goes on from one stage to the next gaining strength all the while along the road of building a new world

From  
**THE IMPORTANCE OF GOLD NOW  
AND AFTER THE COMPLETE VICTORY  
OF SOCIALISM**

The best way to celebrate the anniversary of a great revolution is to concentrate attention on its unsolved problems. It is particularly appropriate and necessary to celebrate the revolution in this way at a time when we are faced with fundamental problems that the revolution has not yet solved and when we must master something new (from the point of view of what the revolution has accomplished up to now) for the solution of these problems.

What is new for our revolution at the present time is the need for a reformist gradual cautious and round about approach to the solution of the fundamental problems of economic development. This novelty gives rise to a number of questions perplexities and doubts in both theory and practice.

A theoretical question How can we explain the transition from a series of extremely revolutionary actions to extremely reformist actions in the same field at a time when the revolution as a whole is making victorious progress? Does it not imply a surrender of positions an admission of defeat or something of that sort? Of course our enemies—from the semi-feudal type of reactionaries to the Mensheviks or other knights of the Two-and-a-Half

International<sup>44</sup>—say that it does. They would not be enemies if they did not shout something of the sort on every pretext and even without any pretext. The touching unanimity that prevails on this question among all parties from the feudal reactionaries to the Mensheviks is only further proof that all these parties constitute one reactionary mass opposed to the proletarian revolution (as Engels foresaw in his letters to Bebel of 1875 and 1884—be it said in parenthesis).

But there is perplexity among friends too.

Restore large scale industry, organise the direct exchange of its goods for the produce of small peasant farming and thus assist the socialisation of the latter. For the purpose of restoring large scale industry borrow from the peasants a certain quantity of foodstuffs and raw materials by requisitioning<sup>45</sup>—this was the plan (or method system) that we followed for more than three years up to the spring of 1921. This was a revolutionary approach to the

<sup>44</sup> The *Two and a Half International* (the official name was the International Union of the Socialist Parties) was an international organisation of centrist Socialist parties and groups that had been forced by the revolutionary masses to leave the Second International. The association was formed at a conference in Vienna in February 1921. While criticising the opportunism of the leaders of the Second International, the association in fact pursued the same policy on all key issues of the proletarian movement and sought in every way to counter the growing influence of Communists among the working class. In May 1923 the Second and the Two and a Half Internationals merged with the so called Labour and Socialist International.

<sup>45</sup> Food requisitioning was a system of procurement of farm produce carried out by the state from 1918 to 1920. It required that the peasants deliver all surplus farm produce to the state at fixed prices. This measure was made necessary by the extremely difficult situation the country was in because of the Civil War and the foreign military intervention.

problem—to break up the old social economic system completely at one stroke and to substitute a new one for it

Since the spring of 1921 instead of this approach plan method or mode of action we have been adopting (we have not yet adopted but are still adopting and have not yet fully realised it) a totally different method a reformist type of method not to *break up* the old social economic system—trade petty production petty proprietorship capitalism—but to *revive* trade petty proprietorship capitalism while cautiously and gradually getting the upper hand over them or making it possible to subject them to state regulation *only to the extent* that they revive<sup>46</sup>

That is an entirely different approach to the problem

Compared with the previous revolutionary approach it is a reformist approach (revolution is a change which breaks the old order to its very foundations and not one that cautiously slowly and gradually remodels it taking care to break as little as possible)

The question that arises is this If after trying revolutionary methods you find they have failed and adopt reformist methods does it not prove

<sup>46</sup> The reference is to the *New Economic Policy (NEP)* conducted by the Soviet government from 1921 to the second half of the 1930's Its purpose was to promote the building of a basis for socialist economy It permitted capitalism and free trade with the key economic positions being controlled by the state The peasants who could now sell surplus product on a free market became interested in working better This ensured adequate food supplies to the town and provided the industry with raw material Free private trade would inevitably lead to a revival of private enterprise but it made it possible to increase agricultural production restore state trade and build up an industry the economic basis of socialism

that you are declaring the revolution to have been a mistake in general? Does it not prove that you should not have started with the revolution but should have started with reforms and confined yourselves to them?

That is the conclusion which the Mensheviks and others like them have drawn. But this conclusion is either sophistry a mere fraud perpetrated by base hardened politicians or it is the childishness of political tyros. The greatest perhaps the only danger to the genuine revolutionary is that of exaggerated revolutionism ignoring the limits and conditions in which revolutionary methods are appropriate and can be successfully employed. True revolutionaries have mostly come a cropper when they began to write revolution with a capital R to elevate revolution to something almost divine to lose their heads to lose the ability to reflect weigh and ascertain in the coolest and most dispassionate manner at what moment under what circumstances and in which sphere of action you must act in a revolutionary manner and at what moment under what circumstances and in which sphere you must turn to reformist action. True revolutionaries will perish (not that they will be defeated from outside but that their work will suffer internal collapse) only if they abandon their sober outlook and take it into their heads that the great victorious world revolution can and must solve all problems in a revolutionary manner under all circumstances and in all spheres of action. If they do this their doom is certain.

Whoever gets such ideas into his head is lost because he has foolish ideas about a fundamental problem and in a fierce war (and revolution is the fiercest sort of war) the penalty for folly is defeat.

What grounds are there for assuming that the great victorious world revolution can and must

employ only revolutionary methods? There are none at all. The assumption is a pure fallacy this can be proved by purely theoretical propositions if we stick to Marxism. The experience of our revolution also shows that it is a fallacy. From the theoretical point of view—foolish things are done in time of revolution just as at any other time said Engels and he was right. We must try to do as few foolish things as possible and rectify those that are done as quickly as possible and we must as soberly as we can estimate which problems can be solved by revolutionary methods at any given time and which cannot. From the point of view of our practical experience the Brest peace was an example of action that was not revolutionary at all it was reformist and even worse because it was a retreat whereas as a general rule reformist action advances slowly cautiously gradually and does not move backward. The proof that our tactics in concluding the Brest peace were correct is now so complete so obvious to all and generally admitted that there is no need to say any more about it.

Our revolution has completed only its bourgeois democratic work and we have every right to be proud of this. The proletarian or socialist part of its work may be summed up in three main points:

- (1) The revolutionary withdrawal from the imperialist world war—the exposure and *halting* of the slaughter organised by the two world groups of capitalist predators—for our part we have done this in full others could have done it only if there had been a revolution in a number of advanced countries.
- (2) The establishment of the Soviet system as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. An epoch making change has been made. The era of bourgeois democratic parliamentarism has come to an end. A new chapter in world history—the era of

proletarian dictatorship—has been opened. The Soviet system and all forms of proletarian dictatorship will have the finishing touches put to them and be completed only by the efforts of a number of countries. There is still a great deal we have not done in this field. It would be unpardonable to lose sight of this. Again and again we shall have to improve the work, redo it, start from the beginning. Every step onward and upward that we take in developing our productive forces and our culture must be accompanied by the work of improving and altering our Soviet system—we are still low in the scale of economics and culture. Much will have to be altered and to be embarrassed by this would be absurd (if not worse). (3) The creation of the economic basis of the socialist system—the main features of what is most important, most fundamental—have not yet been completed. This however is our soundest basis, soundest from the point of view of principle and from the practical point of view from the point of view of the R S F S R today and from the international point of view.

Since the main features of this basis have not yet been completed we must concentrate all our attention upon it. The difficulty here lies in the form of the transition.

In April 1918 in my *Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* I wrote

It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an adherent of socialism or a Communist in general. You must be able at each particular moment to find the particular link in the chain which you must grasp with all your might in order to hold the whole chain and to prepare firmly for the transition to the next link—the order of the links, their form, the manner in which they are linked together, their difference from each other in the historical

chain of events are not as simple and not as senseless as those in an ordinary chain made by a smith

At the present time in the sphere of activity with which we are dealing this link is the revival of home trade under proper state regulation (direction) Trade is the link in the historical chain of events in the transitional forms of our socialist construction in 1921 22 which we the proletarian government we the ruling Communist Party *must grasp with all our might* If we grasp this link firmly enough *now* we shall certainly control the *whole* chain in the very near future If we do not we shall not control the whole chain we shall not create the foundation for socialist social and economic relations

Communism and trade?! It sounds strange The two seem to be unconnected incongruous poles apart But if we study it from the point of view of *economics* we shall find that the one is no more remote from the other than communism is from small peasant patriarchal farming

Trade is the only possible economic link between the scores of millions of small farmers and large scale industry *if if* there is not alongside these farmers an excellently equipped large scale machine industry with a network of power transmission lines an industry whose technical equipment organisational superstructures and other features are sufficient to enable it to supply the small farmers with the best goods in larger quantities more quickly and more cheaply than before On a world scale this *if has already been achieved* this condition already exists But the country formerly one of the most backward capitalist countries which tried alone directly and at one stroke to create to put into use to organise practically the *new* links between

industry and agriculture failed to achieve this task by direct assault and must now try to achieve it by a number of slow gradual and cautious siege operations

The proletarian government can control trade direct it into definite channels keep it within certain limits I shall give a small a very small example In the Donets Basin <sup>47</sup> a slight still very slight but undoubtedly revived in the economy has commenced partly due to a rise in the productivity of labour at the large state mines and partly due to the leasing of small mines to peasants As a result the proletarian government is receiving a small additional quantity (a miserably small quantity compared with what is obtained in the advanced countries but an appreciable quantity considering our poverty stricken condition) of coal at a cost of say 100 and it is selling this coal to various government departments at a price of say 120 and to private individuals at a price of say 140 (I must say in parenthesis that my figures are quite arbitrary first because I do not know the exact figures and secondly I would not now make them public even if I did ) This looks as if we are *beginning* if only in very modest dimensions to control exchange between industry and agriculture to control wholesale trade to cope with the task of taking in hand the available small backward industry or large scale but weakened and ruined industry of reviving trade on the *present* economic basis of making the ordinary middle peasant (and that is the typical peasant the peasant in the mass the true representative of the petty bourgeois milieu) feel the benefit of the economic revival of taking advantage

<sup>47</sup> The Donets Basin was then the biggest coal mining region in the country

of it for the purpose of more systematically and persistently more widely and successfully restoring large scale industry

We shall not surrender to sentimental socialism or to the old Russian semi aristocratic, semi-muzhik and patriarchal mood with their supreme contempt for trade We can use and, since it is necessary we must learn to use all transitional economic forms for the purpose of strengthening the link between the peasantry and the proletariat for the purpose of immediately reviving the economy of our ruined and tormented country of improving industry and facilitating such future, more extensive and more deep-going measures as electrification

Marxism alone has precisely and correctly defined the relation of reforms to revolution although Marx was able to see this relation only from one aspect—under the conditions preceding the first to any extent permanent and lasting victory of the proletariat if only in one country Under other conditions the basis of the proper relation was that the forms are a by product of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat Throughout the capitalist world this relation is the foundation of the revolutionary tactics of the proletariat—the ABC which is being distorted and obscured by the cowardly leaders of the Second International and the half-pedantic and half finicky knights of the Two and a Half International After the victory of the proletariat if only in one country something new enters into the relation between reform and revolution In principle it is the same as before but a change in form takes place which Marx himself could not foresee but which can be appreciated only on the basis of the philosophy and politics of Marxism.

Before the victory of the proletariat reforms are a by product of the revolutionary class struggle After the victory (while still remaining a by product on an international scale) they are in addition for the country in which victory has been achieved a necessary and legitimate breathing space when after the utmost exertion of effort, it becomes obvious that sufficient strength is lacking for the revolutionary accomplishment of some transition or another Victory creates such a reserve of strength that it is possible to hold out even in a forced retreat hold out both materially and morally Holding out materially means preserving a sufficient superiority of forces to prevent the enemy from inflicting utter defeat Holding out morally means not allowing oneself to become demoralised and disorganised keeping a sober view of the situation preserving vigour and firmness of spirit even retreating a long way but not too far and in such a way as to stop the retreat in time and revert to the offensive

We retreated to state capitalism but we did not retreat too far We are now retreating to the state regulation of trade but we shall not retreat too far There are visible signs that the retreat is coming to an end there are signs that we shall be able to stop this retreat in the not too distant future The more conscious the more unanimous the more free from prejudice we are in carrying out this necessary retreat the sooner shall we be able to stop it, and the more lasting speedy and extensive will be our subsequent victorious advance



